

The Basic Outcome Story Part 2.

This is the sequel to the first Basic Outcome Story. I have been circulating the first one. Enough people have expressed support for it and urged me to write some more, that I have decided it will be worth doing so. I have become fond of Ruthie and the inhabitants of D zone on Planet Nearth.

As well, I think there needs to be more fiction written about hypothetical futures under various forms of basic incomes. A good way to explain concepts is to turn them into stories.

Ruthie Kazurdle was at work one afternoon in alternative timeline DFL70709102-C614 for planet Nearth. It was the twenty first year of the Basic Income Revolution. She and Thumbalina Green were staffing the Gassy Greenhouse Collective's booth at the Locomart in Otjivero district, Demogrant city, People's Demograntic Republic of South by Southeasterly Centralia.

"Hey, Zurdle Turtle, my Mom wants another 2 ziters of those nummiberries! So hurry up!" Rased out Urchie Paddleton.

"Watch yer manners, ya brat! I'll get the mart cops to throw ya outta here. Brought yer own container? 5 Dex deposit for a 2Z canister."

"Ooh, I'm so skeered! Need a canister." Urchie waved a Dextik™.

Ruthie weighed out a 2Z standard canister of nummiberries™ and entered the amounts. "4.8 per Ziter times 2, 5 for container, 14.6 dex."

Urchie poked her Mom's Dextik into the Dexbit machine, which bleeped its satisfaction with the exchange.

Behind Urchie stood a woman from the outer powers, who stepped forward and said; "Good noon after. Can you be me selling as well nummiberries Ziters two?"

Said Ruthie; "Two Z nummiberries comin' up. Container?"

"Has me container," said outerlander, waving an outland type of container. Ruthie proceeded to fill it.

"Youse be member, greenhouse cooperative this?"

"No, I just work hourly. Ya gotta be here five years to get to be a partner. I usually work at the greenhouses on Lange street. They rotate us out to these retail booths. Give us, ah, experience. Nine, six, ah, Dex."

"No be here used cash?" Outlander poked her temporary Dextik hesitantly into the Dexbit.

"Ya, I think they stopped cash a couple years ago. Not enough people wanted it anymore. Dextik works real good; just load it up at home or the Dex machine. You can't ever lose your money, get it stole. Less bulky to carry around.

Mostly I just load it up at work" Ruthie added.

"What much pay they you?"

"I get eight Dex, hard hours. That's like; they have to work me or pay me anyway. Eighteen hours a week. I get lotsa soft time too, come in when they need me. That pays twelve. I try to get lots of time; tryin' ta save up some money..."

Outlander did some calculations in her head. "Not much, that is. But you demogrant be get?"

"Oh, ya. I could work for free and get by off the demogrant. Some people here just don't work. I like workin' with growing plants."

"Have labor union you. This they like?"

"Ya, we got a union for all the wage people. They check that everything is safe, the collective follows the regularations..."

"Hm. Very different, where from I be."

Outlander tasted a nummiberry. "Hm, good very!"

She thought a moment. "Where from be I, grocery chain work for. Much buy from greenhouses. We new crops looking for. Maybe own greenhouses start."

"Oh, ya? Uh, maybe Thumbalina be you talk to, er..., I mean maybe you should talk to Thumbalina... here..."

Ruthie stepped back as Thumbalina slid into position.

Thumbalina said; "Yes, our agriculture research directorate is creating new genetically engineered crops. Very high yields, high nutritional content. The nummiberries are designed for greenhouse cultivation under controlled conditions; especially enhanced atmospheric carbon dioxide."

"Is on them patents? Requiring licence?"

"No. It's all on open licence. D zone's gift to the starving masses of Nearth. We'll even give you free seed. You can grow and sell...only condition is you have to give free seed to anyone who wants them"

Thumbalina reached around for her stack of brochures. Ruthie had fetched them from the back of the stand and handed one to her.

Outlander scanned the brochure and frowned. "Organisms modified Genetically they are? Pesticides required? Problems health possible?"

"No, we don't do monopoly capitalism here. We do GMO the right way. No breaking the genus barrier; we don't inject genes. We use controlled mutations or hybridations and test the results properly. And we don't patent life forms."

"Giving free away all this, you are?"

Ruthie handed Thumbalina another brochure and she opened it under Outlander's nose.

"Here we don't believe in trying to own nature. We do sell expertise in greenhouse technology. Our collective has been sending people to various places to teach how to improve yields, control pests, ...on a consultancy basis."

Ruthie turned her attention to a new customer. Urchie watched from the frozen yogurt stand across the concourse, spooning her yogie and snickering at the funny Outlander. After awhile, she went over to the container exchange and redeemed deposits on her Mom's used containers, zapping the money back onto her Dextik.

Outlander moved on, laden with Gassy Greenhouse collective products and information to digest.

"Looks like the rush is done for today, Ruthie. Can you drop by the local council on your way home, pick up a copy of this report about the Lange industrial precinct expansion? I'll put half an hour on your time."

"Sure, Thumb. We gonna get more space?" Ruthie held out her blablet.

Thumb tapped Ruthie's time into her blablet. "Probably. Yet we probably won't need it right away. Trade with NIT zone, The Governance, it's slowed right down lately. Because of the currency problem.

But business with the 'outers' is increasing. I think we just got some more export business. Hork's going to want to talk with this gal; get details about her people and...expansion plans." She zapped Outlander's business card and company brochure off to Hork Storkle, expert in export marketing at Gassy Greenhouse Collective.

Ruthie strolled up the concourse. She checked the time and looked pensively at her left hand. She mumbled under her breathe; "She hasn't twinged..."

She came to Glorabelle's Perfect two, three and four dimension print shop and design studio.

"Ruthie!" beamed Glorabelle, "I have your new frog doll. It's great! Have a look."

Glorabelle slipped into the back of her shop and came out with the newly printed frog.

Ruthie squealed. "Oh, he's perfect! His name's gonna be Boppa cause he's the male incartashion of Bippa. It's sorta like 'dential twin boys and girls. Where's Bippa?"

Glorabelle returned with Bippa.

Ruthie picked up Bippa; "now that she's moving away from Zinna, I'm going to introduce her to Ronno. He's all alone on his lily pad and needs a lady frog to keep him company."

Glorabelle smiled toothily. "Do you need a box for them?"

"No, I got this special carry case for them." Ruthie stowed Bippa and turned to Boppa again.

She regarded Boppa from all directions. "Zinna will adore him. She was sharing a Lilly pad with Bippa for years. They get along real good but...Zinna needs a man in her life. So I thought, what if Bippa got reincarnated as a ...like, ...male frog? It's not such a weird idea. In some frog species, if there's not enough male frogs, some dominernt females, they

go through this...ah,... hersmone change and turn into males, right? The scientific word is, ah... sequencial herpafrodilicium...hermadro..."

"Sequential hermaphroditism, if I recall right from grade school biology. It must solve a lot of romantic problems for frogs." Glorabelle wore her straightest face.

"How much?"

"Six twenty five DEX, plus twenty two percent ThroughPut Tax, Seven sixty two and fifty cents. Dextik?"

Ruthie brandished her Dextik. "That's lotsa TPT."

"I put it through as a plastic form manufacture. If I ran it as a gift/novelty item, TPT would have been thirty four percent."

"Youch! Well, come on, Bippa and Boppa. I'm gonna introduce you to your new friends."

Ruthie strolled across Gramsci square, sat for a few minutes to take in the beautiful summer afternoon, and then went on to the local council office. At the information counter she asked the loyal local council clerk for a copy of the expansion report.

"What? The Locomart expansion? The supermarket thinks it's puttin' 'em outta business? Oh, the Lange street....!"

The clerk slapped a copy onto the counter. "Yah, real estate people complaining. Say they're gettin' crowded out. No private properties they can move for a commission. Business type people; think everything's gotta work just for them."

"Thanks!" Said Ruthie. "What's goin' on at the assembly? Big crowd today."

"It's those two shmazfratzes fresh out of NITzone. Think it'll be a good idea to tax air. They're gonna give 'em half an hour to explain it."

Ruthie walked into the assembly hall. The neighbourhood council chair had just called the motion to recommend the Aardvark park artwork proposal to the full assembly. The matter was not held.

"Now, we come to the main item on this afternoon's agenda. Mr. Henry Kunning and Ms. Georgina Drooger, in accordance with primary law 18, have placed a proposal to their local council regarding a matter of public policy. They wish the Grankist monetary system to be considered by the supreme council of our republic. Ms. Raddie Roofer at the request of the council has looked into this...proposal.

On consent of council she will speak for it in this matter."

The council silently consented. Ruthie slid into a seat in one of the annexes to the council chamber. "Go, Raddie..."

Kunning and Drooger disputed the format of the proceedings. Raddie cut them off; "You have thirty minutes to answer the following question; what exactly is the problem for which the Grankist system is the solution? The council will then determine if the topic merits any further treatment."

Georgina squawked; "We need you to commit to hear us out. You need to take the time to understand this."

Raddie; "Your thirty minutes has started. That is plenty of time."

Henry Huffed; "If you just had the courtesy to hear us, we would present to you the solution to the problem WHICH. YOU. HAVE!"

Georgina; "Here is the solution to all your problems." She waved a small book aloft. "The great economic genius of the last century worked out the ultimate answer to the economic problem. It's all right here." She slapped the book down. "All you have to do is take it up".

Henry; "Over a century ago J. Huster Grank worked out the GRANKIST SYSTEM for providing all of Nearthdom with the money needed. The plain clear air that surrounds every one of us; rich and poor, young and old, smart and stupid,...the one thing we all have in common which is not owned by anyone."

Georgina; "It is the only truly infinite resource of intrinsic value on the planet. All of us would die in minutes if we do not have this resource. Thus this vital commodity must be made free to everyone."

Henry; "If monetized, Nearth's atmosphere could provide an infinite source of precious oxygen. With every exhalation, everyone's personal wealth would increase!"

Ruthie sat, trying to find some thread through what the Grankists were saying. After awhile she grew tired and looked around her. Four people were in that annex with her. Two were interested in the proceedings beyond the screen. One wore a slight smirk. The other was muttering; "Yah, okay, maybe," as she tugged at her purple socks.

Two at the back were more interested in the previous issue; the Aardvark park statues.

“So now we got that poornergraphie sitting there in public.” Said whisperer one.

“Aw, c’mon! The two Aardvarks are not making little Aardvarks. They’re just playful. Nice statue.” spoke Whisperer Two.

The smirker spun around. “Shush!”

Said Whisper Two; “Aw, go somewhere and make little Aardvarks. Yer so ugly only an Aardvark would be...”

Added Whisper one; “Dear, this is why we have these annexes. So people can have side discussions if they want without disturbing.... Why don’t you go sit in the gallery if those two idiots interest you?”

Smirk went and sat in the gallery.

After awhile, Purple Socks pulled her purple socks some more. “Yes, this is real ‘out of the box’ thinking. We should give it a try...”

Witty Whisper Two stood up, pointed her rump toward the speakers below and made a farting noise. “Put a tax on that!”

Ruthie asked; “Is there any chance they are going to really do that?”

“Really no chance.” Said whisper one. “Ever been sortitioned?”

Ruthie; “No, I’ve only been here a year. Ya gotta be here three... I can vote in the assembly but I haven’t done that. I come and watch sometimes...”

W2; “I was on the design committee for Aardvark park. I think we did a real good job. More like a quiet place. A sit and think place, older people place. We already got enough kid’s places, activity spaces. Also enough spaces for people to poop their dwarkin’ dogs.”

W2 took a sip from her juice bottle. “But... the thing with a direct democracy; nobody has patience for nonsense, for people who can’t drop something if it ain’t going nowhere.”

W1; “I still say we got a dirty statue in the Aardvark park.”

W2 nodded toward W1; “Case in point...”

She gestured toward Kunning and Drooger. “But this kind of thing...no one wants to bother with solutions looking for problems. There just isn’t the mental bandwidth, the time, the resources. That’s why they got asked right out front; ‘what is the

problem?’”

W1; “My neighbour’s on the defence policies study committee. That gets into some real serious stuff.”

W2; “She is? So what are we gonna do if it all goes down the tubes in NITville? Is it true they’re makin’ germ war stuff over there?”

W1; “Nothing is clear. Of course defence and security stuff works differently than for the domestic stuff. They pick delegates, one Male and one Female, like other policy areas. But they go to the defence study committee, separate from supreme assembly. They come back, tell the committee what’s up. Then the study group briefs the local assembly, But they don’t give directions back up.

Ruthie asked; “I hear they’re starting to slow down migration into D zone. Too many people are coming over now. What if they close off the treaty line?”

W1; “I dunno. There’s a defence/security council. It runs the army and civil defence, sometimes the police. The defence study group doesn’t appoint them. My neighbour doesn’t understand how they get appointed. But real big decisions are supposed to happen by referendum in assembly. Were you over here last time we did a referendum? About a year ago for the tax changes?”

Ruthie; “Might have been. I don’t recall. What do they do if a war starts?”

W2 fielded this one; “If there’s a war, the defence command takes over, and the security council. They get rules of engagement, passed by referendum. I think the last rules of engagement and defence policy review was three years back.”

W1; “With all this trouble, I think they’re going to ask for policy updates soon. And I think Kunning and Drooger are done.”

W2; “I don’t get these people. I even read some of their stuff. What are they talking about? Taxing the air, selling it, borrowing on it...?”

Below, on the podium, Georgina Drooger shrieked; “Please do not suppress us. We need a commitment to hear us out...”

Said Raddie; “Your thirty minutes are up. Please yield the podium.”

The pages moved in to usher the pair off the podium. Georgina shrieked again; “Don’t touch me! Don’t touch me! I am being suppressed, a poor woman...”

Henry shouted; “You should be ashamed of

yourselves. Why don't you act like adults...?"

A growing wave of hisses from the gallery and some screen thumping from the annexes told them that this would get them nowhere.

Purple socks moaned, "Oh, let them talk! Don't be so mean to them!"

Muttered W2; "Get off it, you scammers! Frapz! Every possible kind of emotional manipulation..."

Raddie took the podium and turned to the council. "Now, can any of you explain what the problem is for which the Grankist proposal is the solution?"

None replied.

Raddie turned to the assembly. "Can anyone in the assembly come up and explain what the problem is for which this is the solution?"

Purple socks jumped up and opened her mouth to shout. Then she froze. Then she slowly sat down. She looked around, blinking, like someone coming out of a trance.

W2 laughed. "Ya drew a blank, hey? They had you going...?"

Roared Henry; "We need to be able to speak with people who can have an open mind about this. WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK WITH PEOPLE..."

Raddie; "You two have had your half hour of our attention. That is all you are getting. Be quiet or you will be removed."

One of the council members stood up and shouted; "Come back again some time and tell us all how to monetize moon beams."

The low hissing in the audience turned to ragged laughter as Kunning and Drooger were herded toward the door by the pages.

Georgina Drooger shouted; "Can you people please just show us the courtesy of hearing us out. These are complicated concepts. You have to be willing to set aside previous ideas to allow yourself...just let us try to find people who can hear with an open mind... help! Help! I am being assaulted by these privileged oppressors..." She fell on her knees as two female ushers took her by the arms, and she continued screaming.

Henry Kunning shoved the two ushers, each half his size, knocking them over. He threw his arms around Georgina. "Why are you attacking this small woman. What did she do to you?"

The ushers chose several members of the audience to assist them, and they linked arms around Dunning and Kruger to usher them out the door as they continued to rant. The audience stopped whistling and turned to the podium.

Raddie spoke again; "So, there is the Grankist system. The council secretary will forward a short report of this to the economic policy committee. However, the Grankists and similar monetary doctrines have been studied by the economic council. We have looked over their writings pretty thoroughly.

We have found there is really nothing there. It is a lot of sterile and disconnected tropes designed to create an emotional response from people. It is artfully constructed to enable people to read into it almost anything they would like to hear. Of course, it is futile to argue against a system which makes no testable claim about anything.

This is all, of course, based on the writings and speeches of this J. Huster Grank, who lived in the centralian confederacy of a century ago. He had no particular qualifications in anything. He failed at several occupations and frequently moved between jurisdictions to avoid debt collectors. He appears to have had a serious drinking problem. Eventually he discovered he could make money by pretending to have discovered a new economic principle.

The Grankist theory goes in and out of style according to the degree of uncertainty and fear in society. It lets frightened and frustrated people think there is a solution without them having to think much about it. It is a good vehicle for people like our guests... who would also like to make a living by pretending to know something, when they are incapable of doing much else that is legal."

Henry hollered; "Please don't get this wrong. We just need to be able to speak with people who can keep an open mind about it..." The door clunked shut on him.

Raddie resumed; "It creates a revenue for this Grankist foundation, which is able to sell franchises to promote this hustle, er, theory, in assigned areas.

It is also very useful for the social suppression forces of various fake democracies. 'True believer causes' like this are incredibly disruptive to real political discussion and organizing. You don't need to send police provocateurs to wreck meetings about economic alternatives to capitalism. Kunning and Drooger, and the vast supply of people like them, can do the job nicely.

About that you can ask the old revolutionaries from

the time of the big breakdown. And it wasn't just a right wing thing. The fake 'Sparxist' groups were the worst of all.... didn't know Sparx from a baboon on drugs.

So there is one of the reasons why we have laws dealing with people who pretend to have a knowledge they do not have. Especially when they are trying to get money out of people.

But also, why we have laws to deal with people who want to discuss public policy outside the public assembly, and who try to create followings around themselves. It isn't to suppress anybody. It is so we can have a democracy.

So, recently our guests had not been prospering over in NITland. The climate catastrophe trope is once more in vogue with part of the oligarchy over here. The idea of a 'green credit' economy somewhat contradicts Grankist ideas. More traditional capitalists have been floating the 'job share' and 'job guarantee' ideas once again.

So, they came over here seeking greener pastures. They were standing in high traffic areas giving out their pamphlets, trying to organize meetings. Our public order service explained our laws to them and the way to bring a policy proposal to the attention of our direct democracy.

And that is how all this came about. They will shortly be told by the public order service that if they continue to violate sections 338 and 343, they will be arrested.

It will also be suggested to them that if they have trouble making a living in an appropriate way, they are free to apply for the demogrant, which for some reason they have failed to do. I think they have the idea they do not want to be dependant on a government. Some sort of residual 'Libertarian' thinking.

And that concludes this topic. I return the podium to the council chair."

Ruthie suddenly stood up and grasped her left hand, staring at it.

"You alright?" Said Whisperer two.

Ruthie; "She's in trouble!"

Whisperer one; "You got one of those pinkitwings™, dear? Converts brain waves into subspace..."

W2 "Well, if she's in trouble, you better go help her out."

Ruthie gathered her bags and sped out of the council hall and across Gramsci square toward her home.

At home, she looked through her safe box for the ponder™ Furd Burffle had given her after the NIT zone protective force made attempts to contact her through her blablet.

"They might be trying to recruit you as a spy," Furd had said, "Or blackmail you. Don't call me on your blablet. Use this and someone from the section will call you."

The ponder tweeped and Ruthie sat, chittering; "Hurry, Furd".

After a few minutes Ruthie's blablet tooted. "Hello, is this Ruthie Kazurdle?"

"Yes. Who's this?"

"This is Brunt Harfett. Furd has been transferred. I'm looking after his case load now. What's happening?"

"Angie's in trouble. She's over in the NITzone. She twinged me just now. Angie Bajanji!"

"You and Angie got those pinkitwings implanted?"

"Yah. She's really in trouble. She's being held against her will."

"Let me check something."

A minute later he said "You're right. Angie is in some trouble over in the zone. You have a pinkitwing link with her that is getting through the jamming somehow, so you can be a lot of help to us."

"What can I do?"

"We need to track Angie down. You're at home right now? We can send a car to pick you up."

"Yah..."



An hour later Ruthie sat in an office at a D zone Defence Force base near the truce line with the NIT zone. Brunt Harfett sat across a table from her and beside him, a woman he had introduced as Eva Squoops.

Ruthie looked at her left pinkie finger. “No, it’s dead now. No response at all. I only got through to her for like, a minute.”

Eva looked into her masklet™. “I have a theory about this. In a couple’a minutes they are going to recalibrate their jamming on schedule. We’ll see if you can get through then. It’s important to get the direction of the twing. Swing your arm like this and see where the signal is strongest.”

Ruthie; “Yah.”

Brunt; “We all need to know three things. Try and get her to tell where she is. Is she being mistreated? Are there other people being held there? Also, let her know that we’re working to get her out.”

“Yah”.

Randy Brump walked in. “Hi, Ruthie. Real sorry you and Angie are having this problem.”

“Randy? Oh, hi...” Ruthie was happy to see a familiar face.

Eva; “How do you know her?”

Randy; “We’ve met a few times. I’ve worked with Angie quite a bit. I’ll be arranging the transportation for this matter. Across the line.”

Brunt; “We hear there’s not being moved over the line right now...this trade problem.”

Randy; “Not much officially, anyway.”

Ruthie shot upright and grabbed her twinging finger. She closed her eyes in intense concentration, mouthing “where are you, where are you, where are you...”

Eva swung her arm, prompting Ruthie to do the same. Brunt stood behind her, aligning his masklet with her finger.

Ruthie; “She’s that way. She doesn’t know where she is...they aren’t hurting her...other people with

her...she wants to get out, wants to get out...”

Ruthie dropped her hand. “Its gone dead again. Randy, she really wants to get outta where she’s at!” She swallowed hard.

Eva; “We’ll try, Ruthie. Real hard. Its getting really crazy over there. We don’t want anyone grabbing our people. We don’t want them ‘disappearing’ anyone. Ever!”

Brunt looked up from his Masklet. “Ruthie, your pinkitwing has a two way encrypted block on it. We can’t spoof it. To track Angie we need you to go into the zone with us. We’ll need at least one more vector to be able to triangulate...pinpoint.”

Eva; “We’ll contact your employer, let them know where you are. I’m sure they’ll give you paid time off if needed.”

Ruthie; “Are we gonna teleport over there? I hear there’s been accidents lately with them things.”

Randy; “All human teleportation is suspended. The jamming those blonkums over there are doing, it makes it unsafe. But we have other ways of getting in.”

Eva pulled a document out of her briefcase and laid it on the table before Ruthie. “There is some risk to this. The NIT zone authorities are not going to be pleased with us doing this. We’ll protect you, but there is the chance of a confrontation with The SoPros. We need you to sign a hard copy consent.”

Ruthie read over the document and took a pen from Eva’s hand. She shuddered slightly and signed.

Eva; “I need you to put your blablet into this box. Extra protection. You’ll get it back when we’re done. Otherwise, they might be able to track you...us.”

Ruthie pointed at the device in Brunt’s hand. “How...?”

Brunt; “This is a Masklet. We use these over there so they can’t track us. We hope.”

Ruthie bit her lip.

Randy; “We ready to go?”



A few hours later Ruthie sat in a van with tinted windows parked by a roadside in a rainy evening in the Negative Income Tax zone. With her were Eva Squoops, Brunt Harfett, a driver, one other Deforce Intel trooper with a strange device on her lap and a backpack full of them beside her, and Sterk Snappler who she had met last year before coming over to D zone.

Brunt hunched over his Masklet. "Stay tight, Ruthie. They should recalibrate again any second..."

Eva; "Let her know that you are with the section and we know what has happened. We won't forget her. We are looking for her."

Ruthie raised her hand and looked at it. "Yah".

Then her hand jerked as though to grab something out of the air. "Angie, Angie,...That way, that way." Ruthie pointed.

Brunt aligned his blablet with her finger. "Try to hold the connection, Ruthie."

Ruthie screwed her eyes shut and her mouth worked silently in intense concentration.

Finally she opened her eyes and dropped her left hand. "Connection's broke again."

Brunt; "She's right around Russell and Gates."

Said the woman with the hardware on her lap; "That sounds like the house off Gates boulevard, near the Galton institute, where the Frod bunch has some sort of monkey business going on."

"Frod!" Uttered Snappler.

Eva; "How is she, Ruthie?"

"She's there with a bunch of people,... all locked up,,,they all want out..."

Ruthie started sniffing. Eva presented a Snortex™ tissue, which Ruthie dutifully blubbered into.

Brunt; "Get us over there, Fluz."

Fluz the driver started the motor.

Fluz had not gone far when the van was blocked by a disturbance.

Brunt; "Where are we..., Happy Life square? Ministry of Employment and prosperity...?"

A large crowd of rain drenched people had spilled off a lawn into the roadway. A squad of Public Disturbance Preventers from the Social Protection

Service scrambled to contain them.

Said Snappler; "None of them look employed or prosperous. Or like they're having a happy life."

Brunt consulted his Masklet. "They've just announced another cut in the job hunter support program. Several groups have turned up to protest it..."

As Fluz attempted to back up, another group of people poured from behind a hedge row onto the roadway, hemming the van in.

"...and some of these folks don't get along."

A few stones and bricks were tossed, and the battle was joined with swinging picket signs and umbrellas, and a few clubs. The PDPs again scrambled, this time to get out of the way.

"You communist pervert bastards have ruined everything! Go to D-zone!"

"We want to go back to the good times before the socialist crony capitalists..."

"We need a jobs guarantee...now!"

Retorted the other side;

"Fascists... communists... d-zone agents..., racists..., misogynists..., climate deniers..., neoliberals..."

"Basic Income was supposed to solve everything! We can't even buy groceries....!"

A gaunt and ragged man leaped from the crowd and began pounding on the roof of the van, trying to see into the tinted windows. "I need a job, job, job..."

His long hair was plastered to his head by the rain, which dripped out of his beard. His blank and blazing eyes channelled the lost mind behind them. He abruptly turned and ran up the roadway, weaving between the blocked cars, shouting incoherently.

Fluz maneuvered the van across the median. A few PDPs who had been standing bemused became alert and moved some people aside, who had been hanging around the fringes of the tumult.

One of them raised a megaphone and began to declaim; "A solution is available for the shortage of money in circulation!"

He was answered by a hail of bricks and some bottles from all factions and fled back across the street.

“Jobs guarantee, now!”

“More money, more money..!”

A bottle broke over the roof of the van. Fluz asked; “Are these the ones who want to start a new currency based on the air?”

Snappler; “No, the air people are the Grankists. These ones want to go back to using notched sticks for money. I think they’re called Tallyists.”

Fluz tootled his horn lightly and a few more PDP troopers noticed that it might be a good idea to assist the traffic which was trying to turn around and get out of the area. Behind them more PDPs tumbled out of a troop carrier and stood, looking confused.

Said Brunt; “They look like they’re just itching to shoot somebody but can’t make up their mind which bunch to shoot at.”

Snappler; “For all the money they pay these flonkles you would think they could find some people with I.Q.s over 90.”

Snappler looked behind to see that the car which had been following them had also extricated itself and was still with them.

From behind them a megaphone blared; “You have no right to beat on that impoverished woman!”

The little convoy moved on. Soon it came to another intersection where another mob scene was playing out undisturbed. There the people were in a much better mood as they dragged goods away from a supermarket which had been broken into and was being looted. The store employees stood helpless, or pleaded into their blablets for the SoPros to make an appearance.

Said Eva; “Funny how the SoPros are out fast and in force for any political protest. But they barely respond to things like this.”

Brunt; “Really bad now. People getting mugged, right on the streets, SoPro shows up hours later. But if people come to the victim’s aid, restrain the perpetrator, it’s they who get arrested.”

A very small woman dragged a very large pack of toilet paper over the crosswalk in front of the van. She smiled and waved at them, and yelled “Shromp the Negative Income Tax. Job guarantee now!”

The light changed and the convoy moved on. Soon they turned off Gates boulevard and went up a side street.

“Here is the place.” Said Hardware Woman.

Ruthie stiffened and raised her arm again. “I’m getting a signal”.

Said Hardware; “Yes, you’re in close proximity. It overcomes the jamming.”

“Pull over here?”ask Fluz, glancing at Blunt. He parked.

Hardware handed Snappler a monitor. Then she pulled a large camera-like device from her pack and pointed it at the nondescript two story house.

An image of the interior of the house flashed onto the screen and Blunt craned his neck to also see.

Ruthie; “She’s awake. I told her we’re right outside. She’s in a cell with some other women. There’s men in another cell. All of them want to get out of there.”

Snappler; “Can you get Angie to raise her hand so we know which one she is?”

Yah. Okay, they have twelve people. Seven men in one cell and five women in a cell next to it.

Ruthie; “They’re being really bothered by this guy, Spazzo...Snazzo, something...”

Snappler; “Security isn’t great here. There are three guards. They only have side arms. They are in rooms at the front of the building, away from their prisoners. They have only one monitor. One guy is watching the monitor but appears to be asleep. The other two are in the other room and seem to be... interacting.”

Brunt chuckled. “Look at those two flonkles making out. Well, we know they’re heterosexual...”

Hardware put down the scanner and picked up another device. She directed it at the house.

Eva; “Ruthie, we need Angie to tell us how they are being guarded. How often do the guards check on them? Can they see any cameras or alarms?”

Hardware; “The place is not made to be a jail; they set this up in haste. The alarm systems are rudimentary. We can block them. The monitor can be spoofed from outside the house. In fact...aha! I can hack the monitor. Here is what our security shlumps are seeing on their monitor.”

Snappler reviewed the images on his monitor. “I can I.D. most of the people they have in there. They’re some of the people who’ve been disappearing in the last few days. Bombardell, Scribney, Woosht,

Harkenfest, ...”

Ruthie; “The guards are just putting them in overnight and not checking on them. They can see out into a hallway; the door has a window. The door is electrical, only opens from the outside. There’s cameras on them”

Eva; “How are they being fed? Those are toilets, are they?”

Snappler; “Way in?”

Hardware; “The boarding on that window could be silently forced.” She looked back at the monitor. “That gives us access into that hallway. The cell doors...”

Ruthie; “They got toilets in the cells. No sink, no water. There’s a room off the hallway where they go during the day, where they get fed. Food’s real bad. In another room this really scary guy comes and asks them crazy questions... There’s just one door the guards and this guy come and go from.”

Eva; “Very good work, Ruthie.”

Hardware peered into her instruments. “The locks on those doors are a simple type, controlled by ‘sponders carried by the guards. No override from the control room. Hey..., looks like the lock on the door heading from the control room to that hallway..., it could be hacked and the guards locked out. A type H-17 device could do that and also open the cell doors.

Oh, yeah...and we’ll need a ladder.”

Snappler; “We can block their outside communications, if they call for help?”

Hardware; “For sure!”

Snappler; “Ruthie, I think we have everything we need to get Angie out. Get all of them out. But there is the big question; can she confirm that she really wants us to go in and get her, given the possibility of violence?”

Brunt chuckled; “Look at those two! She’s dropped her pants now.”

Snipped Hardware; “Keep your mind on the job, Brunt!”

“And the guy in the other room... almost hear the snoring from out here!”

Ruthie; “Yes! She wants you to come and get her. She thinks most of ‘em do, too.”

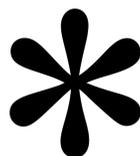
Snappler; “We’re going to move you out of the way now, Ruthie. Tell Angie we are going to try getting her out tonight, but no promises. We will not forget about them. It is important she doesn’t talk about this with the other people in there. Someone might give it away.”

Eva spoke softly into her Masklet. The following car pulled up beside the van.

Blunt looked up from his Masklet. “Extra special ops has the information. A team will be ready in an hour. They advise us to stay on location, but move unnecessary people out.”

Eva; “Ready to go, Ruthie?”

Ruthie dropped her hand and sighed. She unlocked the door and stepped out. Eva followed her as a door of the following car opened for them.



Early the next morning Ruthie woke up on a couch in a large, well furnished room somewhere in NITzone. She was alone.

She threw back a blanket and walked around the room, stretching.

Eva Squoops called from an anteroom; "You get a good sleep, Ruthie?"

"No."

Eva walked in and placed on the large table in the centre of the room a tray full of yumwiches™ and a pitcher of juice with stacked cups. She said; "Here are some yumwiches and juice."

"How's Angie?"

"It all went well. They'll all be here in a few minutes. Eat up. You'll be leaving soon."

Ruthie grabbed a yumwich and chomped. Eva went out.

Soon a door opened and Randy Brump walked in. "Hi, Ruthie. Seen Eva Squoops?"

Ruthie pointed. Randy went into the anteroom. Ruthie poured a glass of juice and overheard Eva and Randy.

"Well, no, Randy, I don't think we need to wait around for them to move the V.I.P. car over. We have that big cargo car, it can take everybody, one trip. We can move those extra seats in...enough for everybody."

Bard Wonkle and her aide walked in. "Hi, Ruthie!"

"Wow! Hi, Bard. What's up?"

"I've been promoted. I'm doing some high level negotiations. A big shot from the NITzone governance council will be here in a minute. She's going over to Our Zone to meet some people on our supreme assembly.

I heard about the trouble you and Angie have had."

"Bard, I don't want Angie coming over here no more. She's got trouble with the SoPros."

"You're right. She'd better stay out of this zone for awhile." She and her aide each picked up a yumwich. "Seen Randy Brump?"

Ruthie pointed to the portal leading to the anteroom, where Randy had just appeared.

He said; "Bard, all we have is one of the big cargo cars. We can't get anything better quickly. I think we

should delay this..."

"No, its okay, Rand. A bunch of people are going across at the same time. It's only a ten minute ride."

"Conditions will be spartan. We may not have enough chairs. This could be seen as a diplomatic gaffe..."

"Ah, we're not doing grand diplomacy here. Better not to attract attention just yet. We can just slip in amid a bunch of other odd sorts."

"Okay, Bard." Randy left, scowling, passing Sterk Snappler on the way out.

Bard; "Good work, Snap. You got them all out? They're here?"

Snappler; "Behind me. Thank Ruthie, here. It wouldn't have been so easy without her."

A crowd of people walked in behind him, including Eva.

"Grab some yumwiches," Eva said; "You haven't been eating too well for a few days."

Angie Bajanji walked past the yumwiches to Ruthie. "Thank you for helping me to escape, Ms. Kazurdle."

"Happy to help, Ms. Bajanji. Just glad yer okay."

They embraced very modestly.

Snappler said to Bard; "The team got in and out without attracting attention. The guards will be awake by now and noticing their little darlings have run away on them. I expect we'll be hearing from Frod and his bunch shortly.

There were twelve altogether. Two declined to escape and two opted to go into hiding in the zone. So I have eight. They're all people the ultra liberals think are our 'destabilizing agents'. All have connections with D zone institutions. Four resident D zone, four resident here."

Bard nodded and looked thoughtfully toward the rescues.

Angie was doing introductions. "Hey, guys. This is the Ruthie Kazurdle I told you about. Her magic finger located us for Snappler's group.

And this is Bev Bombardell. She's from NITzone. Worked on the 'rule of law' project, monitoring SoPro abuse and court processes. Or lack of them. Been getting a hard time from the... even before this..."

"Pleased ta meetcha," said Ruthie.

“Shrep Scribney, originally from South Continent. Working for D zone public TV.”

“Oh, ya. I seen you on the teev a few times.”

“I think I’m going to be on the teev again soon, but not from The Governance. I mean the NITzone. Thanks for your help in getting us out.”

Said Bev; “There were five of us in the cell. One thought she would stay and convince the SoPros she could be a good girl from now on. One wants to lay low in The Governance.

Me, I guess I’m movin’ to D zone.”

The four picked up Yumwichs and juice glasses.

Eva walked up to Ruthie and handed her blabnet back. “You can turn it on now. Tracking is no longer a concern.”

The four sat down on a couch by a side table and continued discussions between mouthfuls.

Across the room Bard’s aide said to Bard; “Plankitt’s here. Just one aide, one security guy...”

Bard strode over; “Councillor Nayla Plankitt! Pleasure to meet you again!”

“Good morning, Commissioner Wonkle. I’m sure we will have useful discussions today.

Who are all these people?”

“Well, this is another subject we will have to discuss. Very simply, we just had to remove some people, who had been working with us in various capacities...from an illegal detention ...which was perpetrated once again by this...uh...’watchers’ group.”

Plankitt looked nervously around. “I don’t think this is the right place to be discussing this. And there are obvious security issues here...”

Sterk Snappler said, looking toward Plankitt’s body guard and back at her; “No security issues here. But we’re going over on a cargo car along with all these people. I’ll make sure some of our own people are between you and the, um, unruly masses.”

Exit Snappler, toward the anteroom.

Plankitt; “We need confidentiality. These are sensitive discussions.”

Wonkle. “We don’t have to discuss anything big right here. But I would like to introduce you to the people

who were being held illegally by this rogue group you seem to have a hard time getting under control.”

Plankitt; “That will not be necessary.”

Wonkle; “Okay, then. But Angie Bajanji over there has been doing some good work for me; collecting information we will need in order to assess how best we might assist your government. How we can help with your growing economic crisis.”

“I’m sure Ms. Banjoja will be able to... ah..., inform you of the...information we can provide you about our...what is relevant about our present, um, nonconfidential aspects of our present conditions regarding...”

“Yes, she was developing a good picture of how your social provisions are failing and what we need to do to prevent a collapse. She was until all her data were removed from her when she was abducted. Getting that information back from the Frod group would save some time, save having to do much of the research over again. However, I am concerned that it is becoming unsafe for our staff to work in The Governance.”

“Uh, well...we do have to maintain security here. Sometimes our security services may make mistakes...”

“We are concerned that nobody in your zone seems to be in control of some of these security... entities. They seem like rogue units, serving some sort of parallel government here.”

“I am not aware of any such, ah, parallel organizations...”

Plankitt stopped as Eva Squoops walked up to them. Bard turned to her.

“Frod is here. He brought one of his...people. Allow them in?”

Bard nodded. Eva left.

Bard said; “It is getting hard for us to figure out who is doing the Governing over here in The Governance.”

“Well, as a member of The Governance Council I take some exception to that. We are well in control of the situation. Within the council we have... debates about...how best to deal with these... situations...and some people...groups, are free to try different...as long as there is no violation of, uh, anything...”

Rug Frod strode into the room, with Erk Sprazzo close behind him. The room fell silent.

Said Bard; "Hello, Mr. Frod. I have heard a lot about you. Been looking forward to meeting you. And who is the charming gentlemen with you?"

Said Frod;" Yeah, right. Where's Snappler? Who are you, anyway?"

Bard; "I think you know who I am."

"Awright, listen, Wonkle..."

Gatt Woosht had strode over from the side table and couch the male rescues had gathered around. "How about give a listen to this, Frod? And especially you, Sprazzo!

I wonder if you want to resume discussions from yesterday at your 'watchers' house, but like where we're on an equal footing..."

Snappler and Brunt Harfett quickly slipped between Woosht and Sprazzo. The latter looked like his brain was about to melt and squirt out through his ears, but he said nothing. Eva stood off to the side, throwing "chill" signals around the room. Plankitt's bodyguard's head bobbed as he tried to decide what to do.

Snappler said; "Put it back in your pockets, people! It won't get us anywhere useful."

Woosht; "Well, if ya wanna go somewhere else, Sprazzo, I noticed a little yard back of this building..."

Confident now that an attack on him would be blocked, Sprazzo exploded; "WHY IS THIS BLASKIST SCUM BEING ALLOWED TO THREATEN ME? WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS THIS GOVERNANCE COUNCILLOR DOING IN THIS RIGHTIST POPULIST HIDEOUT?"

Bard; "Hey, Frod, is there some way to turn down the volume on your attack werewolf?"

Frod grimaced, but gestured to Sprazzo, who glowered but turned toward the door.

But Bev Bombardell shouted; "Yes, thanks for kidnapping us all, you spraxter! Now go back to pouring ammonia under people's doors! Gluing bits of broken glass to their doorknobs..."

"YOU SCUM ARE ALL DISEASED! YOU WILL BE STOPPED FROM DESTROYING SOCIETY!"

Woosht; "Yes, you're a real asset to society, Sprazzo!"

Frod gestured again and Sprazzo resumed his trip

to the door. When it closed on him the silence broke in the room and the buzz of discussion resumed, with a new tone and tempo.

Said Angie to her circle of yumwich eaters; "Yeah, the people he works for want first class services...for the handful of people they will allow to live so as to serve them."

Shrepp Scribney; "And the rest of us are a disease on planet Nearth."

Bev Bombardell; "We're using up too much resources. Pardon us for existing, Sprazzo. Big stupid shkranx..."

At Bard's gesture, Angie went over to where Bard and Plankitt stood.

Said Plankitt; "Frod, Angie needs her blablet back. There is information on it important to economic relations with D zone. And the others need their blablets back. And other belongings."

Frod; "We need to analyze the contents."

Angie; "As was shown during my conversations with Sprazzo back at the hidey house, your people have no ability to analyze or understand anything on it. But if you really want to keep the blablet, we can just do a migration to another device so I can get back to work."

"I will pass your request on to the Watcher's council."

Plankitt; "No, this is an issue. Everything you did here will be a major issue at Zone Security Committee. Your watcher's group cannot act like this without authority. You had no warrant to hold these people."

Snappler; "Frod, you're testing us. You have done this twice already. You keep denying you are holding anyone. We have to find them. If you're going to start 'disappearing' people, we're going to start making your people disappear. You get me?"

"You're threatening us again?"

"The song of the bullying coward, when stood up to. Tell this to your Bosses. I mean the billionaires on the Blazebian fellowship who fund your 'Watcher's' group. They start hunting people down, and we're going hunting for them. And they know what kind of hunters we can be."

"Blazebian what? You're a conspiracy nut, too?"

"No more, Frod." Snappler leaned forward. "No... more! Consider that as coming from D zone central defence council."

Plankitt; “Frod! You will return this person’s equipment to her or I will obtain a council order to give Mr. Snappler clearance to obtain it from you under paragraph 309.”

Frod; “Madam councillor, please explain how you are travelling to D zone today?”

“I, I will be travelling through the, the D zone’s transportation network...to maintain confidentiality on my, until I am ready to, until I complete initial discussions...”

Bard; “Frod, in the basement of this building is the terminus of a tunnel leading back into D zone. There is more than one such tunnels.”

“Show me this tunnel.”

“You can forget about ever seeing this tunnel. I can describe it to you. It is a great piece of work; made using the superior D zone tunnelling technology we developed for our Movatube. Also uses the same reverse gravity drive™.”

“You use this tunnel to infiltrate agents into the Governance zone? To smuggle goods?”

“Frod, you people seem determined to forget about it, but the ‘Bangstoppel’ treaty at the end of the war mandated open movement of people and goods across the truce line. Oh, you remember it when it is convenient for you. But we do not have to ‘infiltrate’ anything. You really have no right to be restricting trade across the boundary line.

In fact, without these tunnels, life in your zone would be even grimmer than at present, especially now that regular trade has almost halted due to our currency problems. For example, many people here would be dying of treatable illnesses because they cannot afford the extortionate prices charged by your pharmaceutical monopolies.

Also, let me assure you, if the operation of this tunnel is interfered with there will be a rapid response.”

Plankitt; “Frod, you will return Angie’s blablet intact within twenty four hours. Now, g-get, get out of here!”

“Yes, Madam Councillor,” sneered Frod, and got out of there.

Plankitt; “So, Angie, ah, Banjanjo...what can you tell me about augmenting the NIT on a temporary basis?”

“It’s Bajanji. I can tell you that any temporary

measure is likely to become permanent. Forget experiments and “pilots”. There is no time and they will not tell you anything, anyway.

I think the big problem is you just do not have the right information to get a demogrant program going here. Also you don’t have a good means of getting it to people. The NIT only gets to a few people at the low end. A lot of people do not file taxes, a lot of people have no bank accounts, a lot of people hide income, a lot just work in the ‘offside’ economy.”

Plankitt; “The word ‘Demogrant’ has a negative political connotation in the Governance.”

“So we’ll have to call it something else. I have talked to people in your revenue system on condition of anonymity. It’s like people are afraid to talk openly, but everyone knows the system is breaking down.

I think it is an inevitable result of trying to use the income tax system to do too many things it’s really not made for. Just to try to do things by stealth that would get too much opposition otherwise.

So now the tax system is paying out more than it’s taking in. It’s become too complex to manage. There are too many ways sophisticated criminals can hack into it and divert funds.

This is getting outside my area...but I think you need to just scrap the income tax system. You need to look at what we do in our zone. The big three; throughput tax, wealth tax, excess profits tax. You’ll have plenty of money...”

“Not politically feasible in The Governance. The sense of the council is toward reduced spending, currency reform, better enforcement of existing tax laws.”

Angie sighed. “Yeah, well... I have nothing to say to that. We have, or had, some people working on other aspects of the revenue and currency systems. I think they all got offside before this...happened.”

Snappler; “Luck! They were comparing notes at Pareto institute. We got a few minutes warning and got them out the back door as Sprazzo’s boo-boo boys came in the front.”

Angie; “Um. Well, my point is, the only way to do this is to give out cash payments. Do it through the community centres and social housing offices. You have to have an identification system so you aren’t paying people twice. Of course face scans, stuff like that, gets political too. Civil liberties; ‘The State’ is tracking us.

The people with useful advice about running programs like these are in the External Assistance

Directorate of D zone. Wonkendirip has organized several relief and recovery operations in the outers. Just create a registry, an I.D. system, and give people cash. No complex admin, no means testing; people won't go through the bother if they don't really need it."

Plankitt; "I don't think we need to resort to such a 'low development country' solution in The Governance."

Bard; "I don't think you realize you are rapidly becoming a 'low development country', Nayla."

Angie; "A big problem will be the rental market. Nothing is going to work if the private landlords can just jack up rents to capture any increase in income of renters. Harkenfest was working on the rental housing stock. He's over there. You should talk to him too."

She pointed to him, as he chatted with Woosht and Harfett.

"He even backed up his blablet hourly to an iron shell server in 'D', so he didn't lose half his work when they grabbed him. Foresight, foresight..." Angie tapped her forehead and snickered.

Plankitt; "Some members of the council are promoting the idea of a jobs guarantee. What is your view of that?"

Angie and Bard looked at each other. Said Angie; "So who gets to dig the hole and who gets to fill it in?"

Plankitt thought a moment and smiled edgily. Bard and Angie laughed together.

Randy Brump called out from a doorway at the side of the room. "Attention everyone!"

He walked to the centre of the room. "The tunnel car is here. But there will be a slight delay and inconvenience due to a humanitarian...situation.

Someone needs to go to a hospital in D zone immediately. She has an obstructed bowel which could burst at any time. For some reason doctors here are not going to operate on her.

Her community clinic has asked for assistance from our liaison service here. Our hospital system is ready to operate immediately but there will likely be a problem moving her through the truce line checkpoints. We can't wait days for them to process a request and risk them also turning it down for some inexplicable reasons...

So we will bring her out through our special

transport links. We will have to remove some seats to accommodate the medical transport frame. This will take a few minutes. Some people will have to take the next car, which will be in two hours."

Bard; "Its okay, Rand. Some of us can strap-hang it for ten minutes. We're tough 'D' people."

"I am concerned about possible protocol issues..."

Plankitt; "Oh, It's perfectly all right. Transport the medical patient without delay. To the...zone..." She frowned.

Bard; "Yes, really, it's okay."

A few voices around the room; "s'alright, s'alright..."

Randy trotted back through the door.

Bev Bombardell piped in; "Obstruct bowel, hah? Probably from all this 'cheap and abundant' food. Braaagh..." She clutched her belly.

There were rumblings of agreement around the room.

Bard; "We are getting more of this all the time. Taking in medical cases from NIT zone... people who can't get treatment they need."

Plankitt; "Well, our health services do not have unlimited resources. Sometimes we have to prioritize."

"Your system of 'prioritizing' needs to be more transparent. However, our main concern is that our own health service is assumed to have unlimited resources. But this brings us back to the basic problem we have.

We can bring your services and infrastructure; health care, transportation, utilities, up to our standards, quickly and economically. But we can't subsidize them. You will have to find new revenues and relaunch your economy."

"Well, the sense of the council is that we cannot impose any new tax burden on our producers while they are under stress."

"That is very self defeating thinking, considering your failure to raise revenues to pay for things is the main cause of your economic distress. You need to bring all this dead money back from the Stashwell islands and put it back into your economy. Start investing in productivity again! Investing!

Look at what we have done in 'D' and how it has worked. We created public banks and used them to drive our productive economy."

“There is a very strong sense among our business councils that we must not adopt socialist measures. We do not want government picking winners.”

“How good have your business councils been at picking winners over the past twenty years?”

Plankitt looked down and was silent.

“Okay, no further with that,” said Bard. “You are here. So you know you have a problem you can’t solve. We want to help you solve it because it is creating big problems for us.

The industrial capitalists, which you are aligned with, are people we can at least work with. What worries us, a lot, is the financial capitalists who sign the paychecks of Frod and his people.

In ‘D’, we often discuss whether we can really call them capitalists. Or are they neo-feudalists?.

But the thing is, considering their long standing rhetoric about humans ruining the planet and the need to sharply reduce population, we do not want them getting their hands on mass mortality weapons; nuclear, chemical, and especially biologic.”

Plankitt looked up. “I hear what you’re saying. I think there is some...there are members of Governance Council who are sympathetic..., a lot who are in agreement, with these points..., some of these points.”

“We have a few days to get into details about all this. Harward and Spermon are coming too?”

“They’ll be here this afternoon, after they hear from me.”

“I think our ride is ready, finally. Hi, Rand. ”

Randy; “Our rail car is now ready to board. We have special seating for the official party, which may board first. Follow me, please.”

They were pleased to follow him.

Eva Squoops circulated among the rescuees, assuring them she had located the whereabouts of their personal property and data and would have it returned to them soon.

Randy returned and called the remaining passengers to board. “Through this door, to your left, down the corridor to the elevator. ”

Shrepp Scribney; “All aboard for civilization.”

Bev Bombardell; “Can’t wait to see this reverse-gravity train.”

Eva Squoops tilted the decanter to get the last glassful of juice. She picked up the last yumwich and carried them over to the side table.

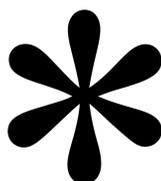
“Are you coming with us?” Asked Hardware as she hefted her pack of equipment.

Eva; “No, I have some work here yet. Get these people’s stuff back...”

Blunt Harfett;” You’re going to get awful tired. Been a long night.”

Eva; “I can take a quick nap here.” She lay on the couch with her feet up and arranged Ruthie’s throw blanket around herself. She ate and drank.

When she was alone, she shouted to the ceiling; “I love this job!”



Three days later, in Ruthie's apartment in the L'Hirondelle housing cooperative in Demogrant city, D zone, Bev Bombardell watched a rerun news report on Ruthie's telescreen, while Ruthie stood with her head in her oven, poking pins into pies.

"They're ready." She opened the door wide and slid the rack of pies out.

Said Bev; "Great report from Shrep. I hope people over here pay attention to it.

You're a big hero, Ruthie. The magic Pinkie finger. There you were on TV, getting interviewed."

"We all got interviewed.

I don't like seeing myself on TV.

You're the big hero. Been over here three days and you're already joining the defence force."

"I think that's what I want to do. I'll only need to stay here one more night, Ruthie. Tomorrow I report for basic training at...this..." She unfolded a slip of paper. "Athena Mall Movatube station. Eight o'clock. Shuttle bus out to the camp."

"I can go with you to make sure you find it. Your temporary tube pass good 'til then?"

"I can get there okay. Transit here is amazing.

What do you pay to ride on this system?"

"Pass is 50Dex a month, unlimited rides.

You can leave your stuff here. You don't have much. But I don't think Deebee...a, D..Z...D..Force will let you take it all."

"No, they gave me a list of stuff to pack. I'll be grateful if you kept my little bit of stuff for a few weeks."

Bev watched the D zone TV news a little longer. "This is really interesting. Instead of maniacs ranting at each other, people who clearly don't know what they're talking about, it's just...here's what's going on and here's why.

And there's only one news channel here?"

"No, there's different news shows for different things. But it's a law here; public business gets done in the assembly, not on TV.

Let's go next door. Grab the sauce."

Ruthie slid two pies onto a tray, and carried it toward the door. Bev picked up the bowl of sauce.

"Door open!" Said Ruthie, and her door opened into the corridor.

Bev followed her out. "You still have voice activated stuff, here?"

Ruthie went one door down the corridor. "Yah, when there's a reason for it. It's not connected to nothing else. It's like, what happens to your body when you don't do nothin' anymore. And you forget how to do stuff for yourself!

Also, no wireless, so no electrosmog. All fibre optic."

The door to Angie's apartment swung open.

Bev chuckled; "You've got Angie on brain wave control."

Ruthie; "Only get the Pinkitwing if you really, really want it. It takes lots of brain energy. But it works in subspace so no health risk."

Inside, Angie was looking into her rotisserie. "Just put it on the table. Ribs are done."

Shrep Scribney was sitting at the table. "Afternoon, Ruthie and Bev."

Bev; "Good afternoon, Angie and Shrep."

Angie; "Get all your stuff back yet?"

Bev; Delivered right to my, uh, Ruthie's door."

Angie "I got my blablet back. All my data is still there.

I hope everyone has thanked Eva."

Angie turned on her Telescreen by exerting her finger on a button. "There's going to be a big announcement at five. I think Bard is making it. I think she's got an agreement about reopening the border with NIT zone."

Bev; "Eva the spook. Bard the diplomat. I am also impressed by Shrep the journalist.

Saw your report again on the teev just now. All about conditions in The Governance and what it's like getting 'disappeared' there.

What are you going to do next?"

Shrep; "I'm being reassigned. I'm going to Eastlandia. Really interesting situation developing there. It is run by really old line industrialist capitalists. They are running the country into the ground in the usual way. They have decided they

are a 'republic, not a democracy.'

But the south province has always had some autonomy. They have had a 'representative democracy.' Of course that's not really a democracy. But a party has come into office which wants a 'social democracy' and think they want to start a Basic Income based partly on our Demogrant. But they say they still accept capitalism."

Angie; "Neither 'social' nor 'democracy' go together with capitalism."

Shrep; "With a lot of these outer states, they are very slow learners. Haven't taken on the lessons of the past two generations. But it'll be interesting. Lots to report about."

Bev; "The news media here is very interesting. I've noticed that only the public news channel gets to report on the government. But it doesn't sound like official propaganda. It's like; 'Here's what the supreme assembly did today. Here's their reasoning.' No effort to convince that it is right or wrong. Everything just is what it is."

Shrep; "That's our style of journalism. The hardest thing is to learn to stop trying to be objective. Nobody is ever objective. It's like, 'this is reality according to the public voice.' You can't have a society without a public voice. It might be The King's voice, the capitalist class's voice, The Mandarinate's voice, The Party's voice. In a real democracy, it is the assembly's voice."

Maybe it's right. Maybe it's wrong. But you can't have a coherent society without a public voice, a public consensus. You just can't. This totally flips out Liberals, but how well have their ideas worked for the past couple of centuries?

So, that's what you're going to take up a gun and defend. You are joining DZDF, are you?"

Bev thought a moment and said in a slow and determined tone; "Yes, I am joining the DZDF tomorrow morning."

The other three clapped and cheered.

Ruthie; "Hey! Bard's coming on the Teev."

Angie; "Teev. Volume. Three."

The teev went to volume setting three, and told them that; "Special negotiator Bard Wonkle and her team have now completed three days of detailed negotiations with a delegation from The Governance council of the South Central Centralia treaty zone."

Bev; "One of these years we gotta come up with better names for these new countries."

Shrep; "Trouble is we haven't had permanent borders since the disruption and breakdown. We aren't likely to get them soon. No one wants to give up on the idea of a United Centralia, so everything stays temporary."

Bard had completed her introductions and got to the substantive issues; "I and my partners from the Governance council of the South Central zone have initialed the following three point recovery plan.

First, with our assistance, The Governance will institute a tax reform which will guarantee the revenues necessary to accomplish the other parts of this program. This will include the elimination of the income tax and the launch of new wealth and excess profits taxes. The transaction tax will continue in a modified form."

Second, our supreme assembly will enact to assist The Governance at minimum cost, over a ten year period, to bring its infrastructure up to our standard. This will include utilities, transportation, and health services.

Third, we will assist the Governance to create a new currency system to replace the metamin system, which is based on the nominal idea of the value of one minute's work.

This new system will be based on the same principle as our own. That is; a treasury which issues a sovereign currency as needed, which is put into circulation partly through program spending, and partly through a public bank making capital development loans at zero interest. Unlike our own system, private banks will continue to operate although they will be restricted.

We expect this program to have two important results. First, with greatly increased revenues to The Governance, its currency will greatly increase in value and trade between the zones can be done in currency again, instead of in kind.

In fact, our economic directorate is ready to announce at this time that it is able immediately, on the basis of this initialed agreement, to reinstate The Metamin into The BlockLink™ system on a temporary basis, so as to facilitate financial transfers and ease cross border trade."

Bard turned and nodded to the representative of the economic directorate standing behind her, who nodded back.

"A second important result of this recovery plan is that, with an adequate supply of a stable currency,

we will be able to assist The Governance to set up a new system of Basic Income. Of course, elimination of the income tax will mean the end of the Negative Income Tax.

A final, very important point relates to a serious security concern of the Demogrant Zone supreme assembly. That is, The Governance party has now agreed to a system of regular inspections of certain research and production facilities in The governance zone so as to insure continuing compliance with the provisions of the Bangstoppel treaty regarding chemical, nuclear, and especially biological weapons.

I believe my partners from The Governance have their own points to make regarding this agreement.”

Visbie Bee, the moderator, asked Nayla Plankitt, the head of the delegation, to begin the commentaries. Plankitt pronounced herself to be very pleased with the results of the negotiations so far, and made pleasant sounds about how good will and patient diplomacy, and preservation of the Free Market System, would insure a bright and bubbly future for all residents of the two zones.

Angie set the table. “My work is going to really start after we get the new currency going. We are going to have to give out cash for the first while. I don’t know what we are going to call this so that it doesn’t sound too much like a Demogrant.

I mean as in; ‘the shnarxin’ communists are printing money again! You cannot print money!”

Nayla concluded by stating that her two colleagues from The Governance Council, representing different ‘interest areas’ on that council, had ‘caveats’ about the agreement, but were not opposed to it going forward.

Visbie Bee asked councillor Stort Harward for his views of the agreement. Said he; “My main concern is that we not begin using communist methods to run our economy.”

Said Bev; “This guy looks like he’s standing knee deep in shit.”

Continued Harward; “We must maintain the personal freedom of a free market economy and insure a return to economic growth and prosperity by returning to a free market economy which insures economic growth with prosperity and personal freedom...”

Councillor Spermon now cut in; “We need green growth and green jobs which do not exceed Nearth’s carrying capacity. The general population

must limit their expectations to what is realistic within these limits. Populism which creates demands beyond reasonable expectations must be challenged.”

Bev; “This guy’s a sleaze. Got that deceiver’s smirk.”

Spermon; “Further, I find it objectionable that restrictions continue to be placed on the use of technology to benefit human kind and prevent overuse of natural resources.

Raising restrictions on biochemicals will allow more food to be grown in less space. Continued biomedical research will strengthen humanity’s defences against renewed pandemics.

The relaunch of nuclear technology would insure abundant cheap energy without any new greenhouse gas emission or harm to natural terrains.”

Bev; “So, what do you think about this abundant cheap energy from nuclear power, Shrep from South Continent?”

Shrep grimaced; “Not at the dinner table.

I was only three when that happened. My family had to leave everything behind. A least we all got out alive and healthy.”

Bev smiled; “ You can come back for it all in 500 years...”

Shrep looked strangely at Bev and groaned. But her groans turned into a happy hum as Angie and Ruthie laid down ribs and roast potatoes.

Said Angie; “While we watch that, here is some food for thought. Barbequed pork ribs a la Chateau L’Hirondelle. Roast potatoes in Sauce a la Ruthie Kazurdle. Eat up, eat up!”

On the screen, Visbie Bee relayed written questions from the journalists in attendance.

“To councillor Spermon; your affiliation to the Blazeblan fellowship and the financialist backed green political movements all over Nearth, is well known. These groups are connected with the outbreaks of mysterious and deadly infectious diseases during the conflicts of the disruption and breakdown of a generation ago.

The power of these groups was diminished as a result of those events. In recent years, they have been regaining their influence, rebuilding their power. The concern of aware people all over Nearth is; is this ‘Plan Huxley’ still on? Is there still this

idea of eliminating the 'surplus population' so that an elite can continue to consume all of Nearth's resources, to not have to reduce their own consumption?"

Spermon; "I will not respond to conspiracy ideas from populist crackpots." He walked off the stage.

"Well!" Huffed Visbie.

"Financial Capitalists." Said Shrep. "We can pay ourselves whatever we need. We only need a few people to serve us and produce what we need. The rest should just drop dead."

On the wall, Visbie looked at her blablet. "Our next question is for councillor Harward.

Councillor; the resource potential of Nearth seems to have reached its limit two generations ago now. There has been no net economic growth since then. The global population appears to be declining. There seems to be enough production to provide everyone with a decent living but it is badly distributed.

And yet the institutions you represent in your council endlessly promote the idea of renewed economic growth. They are vague about what is to be grown, how, and most importantly, why? Can you clarify this for us?"

Harward; "Human ingenuity is without limits. No chains must be placed on the will of strivers to achieve for the benefit of all humanity. Government is always a problem, not a solution."

Harward paused. He looked to Spermon, still standing in the wings. "There is one particular concern about the assembly zone government which I think all my colleagues are in agreement about. We have concerns about the efforts of the socialist government here to create some sort of alternative to The Internex.

The Internex has become critical to all governmental and commercial activity on the planet. Any changes to this system could be highly destabilizing and must be undertaken only after thorough study and consultation and general agreement."

Said Shrep, between mouthfuls of meat; "Yes, government is terrible except when it serves us. And ingenuity is great as long as we can control it, expropriate the results. And we always need more, more, more, or we can't get paid. Industrial capitalists."

"How's the chow, Shrep?" Asked Angie.

"Finger lickin' good!" Said Shrep, and proceeded to lick her fingers.

In the studio on the screen on the wall, Visbie had a question for Bard from a journalist from one of the outer powers, who was allowed to ask it himself.

He said; "Madam Commissioner; concerns are being expressed in our media and from our government institutions, for the rising influence of your declared Republic in the southern area of Centralia. I note that your Republic is not recognized by the League of Nearthly nations.

Nonetheless you function as an independent state, and have developed substantial economic and military power. As you have failed to conform with InterNearthian conventions on such matters as patent and copyright law, investor rights, transborder trade, and internex compatibility, this creates certain instabilities and concerns about further instabilities and harm to finely tuned internearthian systems.

We are in accord with the concerns already expressed in this venue, about your program to develop an alternative to the internex. There has been a general agreement to maintain the existing systems as they are, allowing changes only by consensus.

Can your government guarantee that in future it will conduct itself according to Internearthian conventions and make no sudden and destabilizing initiatives?"

Bev; " Yeah. Pardon us unruly D zoners for being too successful."

Shrep; "Yes, our system is working and theirs is failing. Very destabilizing for them."

Bard responded to the questioning. "I should make some clarifying comments on two subjects raised by my partners. First, we have never made a formal declaration of independence, and for a reason. We wish to leave open the possibility of a reunification of the territories of the old Centralian Republic on terms agreeable to all the successor states.

Second, we have no interest in destabilizing anything. The idea that the gains of one party or entity must come at the expense of any other, or creates any imbalance of forces, is very out of date thinking.

As for the project of our directorate of communications, announced several months ago, to develop certain already existing innovations it has created, into a new Integrated Public Communication Vector, this is not aimed to harm or hinder anyone. We have looked at the problems which the existing

Nearth wide system creates for us and decided a simpler system is possible which better meets our own needs.

We are cognizant that various interstate and trans-state organizations are reliant on the facilitation of Nearth wide surveillance and economic management which the existing internex provides. For this reason previous initiatives at redesigning the Internex have been suppressed. However, we will develop our own system slowly and with thorough testing. We will not force it on anyone.”

Bev shook her head; “Too much silver plated language for me.”

Bard continued; “As for other concerns raised;

As to patent and copyright, we believe these have been allowed to go beyond their original purpose. From being a system for compensating creators for their work, they have become a form of rent and a cause of rent seeking behaviour. As well, patents have often become a means of abusive and unjust economic regulation.

As to investor rights, there is no divine right to be an investor. We are able to generate our own investment capital from within and it works fine for us.

As to transborder trade, we believe that most things should be produced close to where they are consumed, and polities should have an economic policy of import replacement to the greatest feasible degree. However, transborder trade is still desirable and should be regulated through a system of floating currency exchanges, rather than a single reserve currency. This protects less developed economies from the problems of unfavourable terms of trade.

All this is in conformity with the published policies of our social republic. Again, we do not wish to infringe on the legitimate interests of any other state party or prescribe what they should do in their own territory.”

Bard nodded again to the row of head-nodding D zone government officials behind her.

“Are you getting this, Shrep ’n Angie?” Asked Bev, shaking her head.

Shrep; “Yeah. You work in this, you catch onto the

jargon, the ideas...”

A little later, the telescreen was on low volume again and the well fed four were laying on pillows on Angie’s living room floor.

Shrep burped into her hand. “Ruthie, do you have a recipe for that sauce?”

Ruthie; “Check your blablet.”

Shrep; “So how are your frog’s social lives going, Ruthie?”

“So far, okay. Boppa and Zinna hit it off right away. They were always made for each other, just needed some tweaking. Bippa and Ronno are a little slower catching on. Ronno has been alone for so long, but he’s startin’ to... loosen up. Shoulda got him a girlfrog friend a long time ago.”

“So how are Ruthie and Angie getting on?”

Ruthie and Angie looked at each other. Ruthie spoke; “We’re getting married. Got a honeymoon booked for September. Going to a little place on Sunnysand island.”

The other two cheered and applauded.

Ruthie; “And tomorrow Bev is going to be a...D... B..., a defence force trooper. And Shrep will be a reporter again in Easterlandera.”

Bev; “Thanks for putting us up for a few days, you two. It’s hard to find accommodations in ‘D’ right now. There’s supposed to be restrictions on new migrations over here. But even that New Arrivals centre,...the place was crammed!”

Shrep; “What future do you predict for us with your crystal ball thingee, Angie?”

Angie rolled over and stared a moment at Crystal Ball Thingee.

“Bev is going to become a first class DZDF trooper. And never have to get into a real war.”

Angie stared some more. “Shrep is going to find lots to report about from Eastlandia in the next few years. Especially about their new experiment with Basic Income.”



The moral of this part of the story is; the devil is not hiding in the details. He is always standing in plain sight.



This material may be freely distributed as long as it is not altered in any way and the creator, Tim Rourke of Toronto, Canada, raccoon@burble.ca, <https://www.burple.ca>, is cited

