

The Basic Outcome Story Chapter 3

The Basic Outcome Story continues. There is a moderate interest in it. The topics related to a Basic Income, which could be visited in these stories, are increasing. Historic developments in the year 2021 are expanding the scope of discussion about a Universal Basic Income, better called a Guaranteed Living Income. UBI advocates on Planet Earth are starting to notice that it will take something more than just this one idea to solve the problems of the turbulent twenties.

Ruthie Kazurdle and Angie Bajanji were playing gravbop™ in Aardvark Park in Otjivero district, Demogrant city, People's Demograntic Republic of South by Southeasterly Centralia, in alternative timeline DFL70709102-C614 for planet Nearth.

It was a balmy spring morning in the twenty third year of the Basic Income Revolution, and about a year after the NITzoner and Northians war and the Nickelvirus pandemic. All was going well in their world.

Humphrietta cut power to the gavbob shuttle, ending their session. "Time up! The school girls is here!"

Ruthie and Angie walked over to Humphrietta's concession stand, as a gaggle of little girls brushed past them toward gravbop court B, one of them carrying a multipak of jumpijuice.™

"School's out!" Said Angie.

"A buffleburger™ and a jumpijuice. Each!" Commanded Ruthie.

"Same for me. Separate order." said Thumbalina Green.

"When'ja get back, Thumb?" Asked Ruthie.

"Last night. Just here a few days to talk things over with management. Still complicated in South Eastlandia, but the way is clear for us to relaunch the project. I think. So we'll need some experienced staff over there. "

The Dexbit beeped at Ruthie's Dextik, and Thumbalina put in hers.

Said Thumbalina; "Hey, Humph, is this stuff actually cheaper than last time I was here?"

Humphrietta grunted. "Some ingredient costs down. Government makes sure we got enough for ourselves...fore we give any to the outlanders who've...umf...messed up...."

"I've been over in South Eastlandia for awhile. Got used to prices for everything going up all the time."

"Sit right down and tell us all about it, Thumb." Said Angie.

"So I shall, so I shall..."

Humphrietta served up their orders. She mumbled; "Wraps'r new disposal stannerd. Grbogadr takes em." She pointed to the new Garbogator™ installation.

With "thank you's" to Humphrietta, the threesome headed over to the seats by the Aardvark sculptures.

Said Thumb; "Dear me, dear me. I still wonder what those critters are up to!"

Ruthie; "Been enough contrabersy about that."

They chomped buffleburgers in silence for a few minutes.

Said Thumb; "I see they've finally taken down all those Wave C transmitters."

Angie; "Yes. Another solution looking for a problem. Some tech industry Billionaire and self styled genius thought it would work for him; help him take over and run the world. Nobody wanted it. Didn't work. Caused huge interference with other systems, important public systems. Messed up biological systems. Drove away the birds and bees, caused health problems in humans..."

Said Thumb; "In the end they just write it all off, go on to the next crackpot tech revolution."

"How it goes..." said Angie.

"But, talking tech revolutions, those are the new 'comvecs™' you two are carrying?"

Angie pulled her comvec out. "Yeah, we're testing them out. I like it so far. It's like, what I need instead of what they want to make me use."

"What an idea. Build something around the needs of the user, instead of the needs of the control freaks. And actually field test the thing before you try to shove it down everybody's throats."

Angie flicked through the handset's features for Thumb. "In mobile mode it uses quantum entanglement to track you, send simple audio information. Nothing is visual at all in that mode. Really good idea; people can watch where they're fratzin' goin' instead.

You go to visual mode, text, games, ya gotta stay in one spot or it cuts out. You can't download video, big files over the air. That largely eliminates electrosmog, health problems for humans, confused bugs and birds...

For heavy data transfer, gotta go to a stationary device. From there, everything is by fiber optics. Nobody gets an 'internex of thingees' going on in their living space. Smart appliances are self contained or voice activated, or fibre connected.

The rule will be; any mobile device will have to be connected to a home stationary device. Everyone has to own one. You can still go to a Nex cafe, library, whatever, and plug into the fibre net, but it still has to go back to your base device.

So, no more anonymity. Everything can be immediately tracked back to its home base. That just about eliminates criminal and irresponsible activity on the net. We hope.

Also they can still track you. You can't shut that off. I have no problem with that. Government needs that to deal with criminality, epidemic control, emergency response...

Look, if you don't think you can trust your own government, keep your thoughts to yourself until the revolution is on. Who are you going to trust? Private profit taking corporations? Foreign governments and their intelligence services?

Paranoid civil liberties types can go soak their heads.

And this is strictly a public utility. There is only one service provider. Private companies can create new applications, but they have to be licensed by the system. They don't get to just shove their crap out there.

The result, we hope, is that we have a manageable system. Because every kind of flex can put whatever he or she wants on the nex, the system has become completely unstable. It's almost impossible to keep information secure, or transactions.

So that is what this is all about".

Angie put her comvec back in its holster with a dramatic flourish. Ruthie mimicked the motion, giggling ever so slightly.

Thumb sighed dramatically and also giggled behind her hand. "Okay, Angie.... So when do I get one of these marvels?"

“They’ll start rolling the system out within a year. Of course everyone will have to get the equipment, learn to use it. More stuff needs to be written for it.

The two systems will operate alongside each other for a few years. I dunno how long it will take to get it all over Nearth. There will be huge resistance; lots of vested interest in the old system. Especially from the various ‘surveillance states’”.

A tall, athletic and attractive delivery person in skin tight, netted, revealing woogie pants coasted past them on roller blades. On gravbop court A were some male adolescents, let out early from the construction apprenticeship program. All were suddenly watching the watchable Deliverer instead of the game, and one got hit in the face by the bopshuttle, staggered back into a pole, hit his head, dropped to the ground, and sat holding his head.

“Oh, dear!” Said Thumbalina.

Several concerned gravboppers gathered around the injured one.

Hollered Humphrietta; “Hey, lady, yer creatin’ a safety hazard!”

Said Deliverree, pivoting to look behind her, and laughing; “Oh, I know. Isn’t that scandalous?”

Party pack order ready? Eleven baffleburgers, one woggle weenie, eleven jumpijuce, one fizzie cola. For Blurp at; 23A, Hasenfratz housing coop?”

Humphrietta slipped the order from her warmer into Deliverree’s bag in one smooth motion.

A gravbob shuttle uttered; “Do. You. Wish. To. Resume. Play?”. Someone put it on ‘pause’ and it sank to the ground.

Deliverree went past Thumbalina and friends and turned at the Aardvark statues. A delivery

robot came up the path in the opposite direction.

Deliverree blocked the robot’s path. Robot moved to pass around her. Deliverree moved to block it.

Robot emitted some beeps and a “Move. a. side. please.”

Deliverree said “Get off my track, ya slorchin’ bugface! Beep! Beep!”

Robot kept repeating the message. Deliverree took off her hat and placed it over Robot’s ‘eyes’. She spun Robot around a few times, leaving her facing toward where she had come. She removed the food carton from Robot’s pan and hid it in some bushes. Then she retrieved her hat.

Robot said “Please. Return. Items. To. The. Warming. Pan.” Its head spun in 360 degree arcs as it tried to reorient itself and search for its cargo.

Shouted Angie; “Hey, Woogie Pants? While your cute little ass is being smart, somebody’s food’s getting cold.”

A few rumblings of agreement were heard around the park. Deliverree saw the logic of this, returned the package to Robot’s pan, and rolled off on her mission.

“Thank. You.” said Robot. Its head turned toward the direction it had been going, its body pivoted that way, and it set off.

A grumpy old woman was walking up the path. She stopped as she saw Robot approaching. Robot slowed and maneuvered to pass well clear of G.O.W. who nonetheless delivered a strong kick, leaving another dent in Robot’s well battered fender. Robot continued uncomplaining on its way.

“Drag Mumfit! These ...things! It just about ran into me!” Snarked G.O.W. to the bushes.

Said Ruthie; “Is it okay to feel sorry for bots?”

Angie; "Yes, feel free to feel sorry for bots."

Ruthie; "Think bots, artificial intelligence, will ever replace humans?"

Thumb chuckled; "When they build ones that can get angry! Then we are indeed in trouble!"

Angie; "Starting to see a few human deliverers again. They banned them for awhile during the Nickelvirus."

"Has a physical injury occurred here?" Said a First Response Service drone as it arrived over the gravbop court.

Angie; "Here is some more artificial....unintelligence."

The injured gravbop player was now on his feet, with a tissue stanching the mild trickle of blood coming from his scalp.

One of the concerned companions standing around him shouted back; "Yah, he's okay. He's just got slight brain damage. No one will notice the difference."

The little girls in the other gravbop court waggled their hands as they looked up at the drone. "Hi, Fressie!"

The Flying Fressie dispensed some advice about concussion signs and moved silently away.

More hand wagging. "Bye, Fressie!"

Angie; "They're always predicting that bots will take over all jobs. Not gonna happen. Three big reasons.

First, no one can make money off robots, Artificial Intelligence. They're fixed capital, machinery. You can only get surplus value off of variable capital, humans. Even without capitalism, we need to create a surplus so as to run all government services, infrastructure.

Second, there is no point to Artificial Intelligence

if it's taking away work that people actually like doing. It is for work that is boring or harmful for humans. Some owner/manager types would rather deal with machines than people, but it never works for them.

Third, people just do not like dealing with smart-mouth machines. They usually prefer to yell at a human operator. Folks tend to get very paranoid about bots that are made to be hard to tell from humans."

Thumb; "Oh, so I'm not going to be obsolete anytime soon?"

Ruthie; "Here comes somebody who's kinda obserlete.

Hi, Wozzie! Any luck finding a job?"

Thumb; "She used to work at our site? Think I remember her."

Ruthie; "She also lives in our building."

Said Wozzie Platner, plopping onto the bench beside Ruthie; "Hi, Ruthie. Hi, Angie. Hi,...?"

Ruthie; "This is Thumbalina Green. She's a manager with Gassy Greenhouses. Just got back from workin' on a special project in Eastlandia."

"Yah, I remember ya, Tumblerina."

Wozzie thought a few moments, her face turning to a frown.

"Yah, still lookin' for another job. Sure wish I could find something. They say the econermy is all back from the war an' the Nickler..."

Ruthie; "Humphrietta might be looking for an assistant."

"Working in kitchens scares me. Had a accident; spilled some hot grease on myself. See the scar?"

They saw the scar.

Angie; "Live delivery runners are allowed again. Ever done that?"

"Tried that. Kept gettin' lost."

Thumb; "What have you been able to do for awhile?"

" I did cleaning at that subspace place over on..., ah,..."

Angie; " The subspace research station on Moonbeam road?"

"Yah. Weird place. Got ghosts in it...I seen 'em, working at night. Just popped outta nowhere. They disappear. One of 'em waved at me once."

Angie; "I know professor Ansible at the University. He has worked out of that station. Theoretical physics. Very theoretical. He doesn't say much but they seem to get reflections from some kind of other dimension."

Wozzie; "Yah. Like ghosts. But anyway... after awhile, everything got more secret there. They ottermated all the cleaning. All that work is ottermated now. I could do it okay. I was okay if somebody helped me mix the chemicals up.

Now I can't find another cleaning job."

Thumb; "Hasn't the labor directorate helped you? Have you had an employment assessment.?"

"Yah. They say I got some cognicle...something. Want me to work in one of them 'special employment' places. But I need a real job.

I worked at yer greenhouse, Ruthie and Thumb. Yer lookin' for new people. I think if I had another chance I could learn to work that mixer..."

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Thumb; "Well, Wozzie, my dear, most things in greenhouses have to be done just right."

Ruthie; "Soil media gotta be mixed right for different plants..."

Sighed Wozzie; "Sorry about the mixup with the

mixer..."

Thumb; "Small worries, small worries..."

I think you should give 'special employment' a try. They can get you into a lot of fun things that will make you some extra money. At the site, we bring in people from special employment' when we have certain types of jobs to be done."

Wozzie; "But I can't be just a welfarian. I need a real job."

Angie; "Who is slinging that disgusting term 'Welfarian' at you?"

Wozzie stared silently at her shoes.

Suddenly Ruthie stood and said; "Hey, Woz, watch me feed the garblegator." She picked up the food wrappings.

"Thanks Ruthie!" Said Angie and Thumb.

Wozzie suddenly spoke; "My family won't talk to me no more. I can't even come visit them. I don't work, so I'm, like, no good."

Thumb; "Why not just forget about them then? You have the demogrant, you have good housing, you have ways to make extra money. If your family are such ignorant people..."

Humphrietta bullhorned; "You guys on court A. Time up. The Glonkum centre ladies are booked in."

The bopshuttle drifted back to its charge station, while a fresh shuttle floated out to centre court.

"Have fun, fat old ladies."

"All yours, grannies. Oof, oof!"

"Respect yer elders, young men!"

The garbogator lit up, played a jingle, thanked Ruthie for conscientiously depositing her garbage, itemized the bits of wrapping, and

flashed the information that Humphrietta's Aardvark Park food stand would be charged thirteen cents waste disposal tax.

Wozzie spoke again. "I really like my granny in Northia. And my cousins. I wanna go home and visit her. They won't answer my zaps..."

Angie; "Why did your folks come here from Northia?"

"More work here. Not much work in Northia. But they don't like the commamizum here. They work for people who pay them in Northia money, cash; send it all home to Northia.

They keep gettin' in trouble, not following laws..."

Thumb; "I think I know the kind of people they are working for. They cause some problems in the agriculture sector here."

Ruthie; "Woz, sometimes families are just messed up; stuck in a way of thinking that don't make no sense..."

Wozzie studied her shoes some more.

On the gravbop court, the old ladies moaned as the gravbob zipped past them, scoring goals rapidly. "Hey Humpf, how do you adjust settings on this skruggin' thing?"

Ruthie jumped up again, raised her hand shouting; "Lemme..." She trotted over to the court.

Thumb tapped on her blablet. "Here's the local special employment centre. You can get some good counselling there. Get onto a better path."

Wozzie hesitated and then pulled out her blablet and clapped it against Thumb's. She looked at the information. She said, "Okay, Thumber....I'll, uh, go see 'em."

She then fled quickly away.

Thumb; "So much of this in Eastlandia. But

we still have it here, too. People who have some sort of masochism problem, want to live like serfs. There are always plenty of people who will exploit them, who want to be business people but have no ability, couldn't make it if they had to work by the rules in a well run economy."

Angie; "I'm working in NITzone, whats left of it. Similar problem there. Of course there, it's all totally destroyed by the war, the nickelvirus, the economic collapse.

We're trying to get the economy going. But we are getting resistance, even from people who would greatly benefit from reconstruction.

It's like this; people have been locked into a 'master and servant' economy and mindset for generations. They've internalized that they are worthless unless they can do grunt labor and they don't think they are worth more than subsistence wages.

The worst thing, is they resent anyone doing better than themselves, or even aspiring to something better. The second worst thing, is they hate government. For generations government was there mostly to screw them over. Instead they identified with their 'masters', their bosses.

They can't understand that government can also give them things, give them the basis for a better life. 'The Boss' will never give them more than just enough to stay alive. Industrial capitalism."

By the gravbop court, Ruthie watched as the old ladies lost more slowly to the Bopshuttle, moaned, and hobbled back to centre court to await the shuttle's next attack.

Thumb; "Automation and Basic Income were supposed to end this. So the theory went."

Angie; "Those theories don't work. Surplus value comes from people, not machines. Bad Basic Income just gives Masters cheaper Servants, Serfs, Peasants.

Here in 'D', we're gradually getting rid of this 'master and servant' nonsense by drying up the supply of servants. It takes some time to get through to these 'identify with the master' types. It seems like sometimes a whole generation has to die out."

Thumb; "Oh, dear, but we do have that problem in South Eastlandia! We have a cultural clash between our staff setting up production under the 'boost up' program and the local people they are trying to train.

The Easties, they simply cannot loosen up! The economy there is so bad, the unemployment... The Demogrant they have over there does not seem to help.

But the thing is, they get so angry when we expect them to have some initiative, to think things out for themselves. They think they are being put on the spot. They keep saying they don't want to make a mistake."

Angie; "Interesting. I think I am going to spend some time there. The government there has been asking for advice about fixing their Demogrant plan. Once we have the transition program in place in rump NITzone, my work there will be mostly done."

Ruthie sat down again.

Thumb; "Have the Glonkum ladies found their level?"

Ruthie laughed. "Skill level or...level?" She floated her hand above the ground as though gauging a height.

Thumb; "I'll have to try that game some time. Does anyone keep score?"

Ruthie; "No, no teams. Just people against the bopshuttle. It's real popular so ya gotta book it..."

Thumb; "Well, Ruthie, do you think you would like to go and work in Eastlandia for a couple of years?"

"Shmanks! It's totally crazy over there!"

"Yes, I know. I've been working there. But we've come to an agreement with the Hoodle government. We're relaunching the 'boost up' program. We're gonna full out reopen our greenhouses and build new ones.

So we need new people there to train local Eastlanders. I was just telling Angie, there are some slight cultural differences to overcome. We need people who can be patient.

It's fifty percent extra pay, more hours. I know you like more hours. We live in a compound for Demograntic republic workers, with our own stores, medical and other services. A mini 'D' zone.

We've noticed, Ruthie. You're a pretty good teacher and a good worker. You're patient and have good hands, good at cutting and grafting."

Ruthie glanced at Angie and thought a moment. "So you're talking about, they wanna send you to Eastia next to do some more...ah...program design... stuff..."

Ruthie looked back at Thumb. "So that sounds like a plan..., maybe. I'm gonna be working directly with you?"

"No, they'll probably move you around a lot. But you'll run into me. I'll be doing coordination with the Eastlandia private contractors."

Thumb showed them pictures on her blablet. "Here's the compound we've set up there. Everything up to 'D' standards. We're gonna expand it. It's just outside of Portville city. All the staff from the agrisector, geothermal, and light specialized production projects will be there. All the 'raise up' program projects. Create a whole new industrial complex.

Angie, a lot of diplomatic, aid people, live at the compound. You and Ruthie can share a nice semidetached..."

Angie " Yeah, I know. They're consolidating

everything there for security reasons.”

Angie looked at Ruthie. “They don’t think there is a big security problem. We’ll have our own security force. We have a good understanding with the government there now. There are some extremist elements from both industrial capital and financial capital front groups. Trying to blame us and the Frostians for the Nickelvirus. It looks like the Hoodle government has them effectively suppressed.”

Ruthie bit her lip. “Some bombs have gone off over there. Some people got hurt and even...”

Thumb; “Well, Ruthie my dear, I have been over there a year and a half now. It can be rough sometimes but we are building some great things there. We are having positive effects on people who really need to be shown a better way of doing things.

I don’t want to let a bunch of creepy spratzers scare me off.”

Angie; “Tell us more about your experiences. You were part of a skeleton crew keeping critical things going during the epidemic there. So I understand.”

“You understand rightly. It was like this; the Hoodle government with these ‘progressive’ ideas came into office in the south province of Eastlandia. You know, Ruthie, it’s one of these places where they still use this ‘representational’ system. It’s hard to explain.

Politie Hoodle and her progressive party wins a majority of seats with a third of the vote, not a great system, but now she is what is called ‘first minister’. She gets to form a kind of government council out of the members of her party in this assembly. They seem to think this kind of system is a democracy.

But each member of this assembly is elected by a direct vote of all the people in these districts of roughly equal population. These districts have no other purpose but to elect a representative to the assembly.

They have political parties. So each party puts up a candidate in each district. Whoever gets the most votes is the representative for that district, even if she, he, got say, a quarter of the vote.”

Ruthie; “How can one person represent a whole district? Especially if most of the people didn’t want him, her?”

“Exactly. Not a very logical system. A party that didn’t get so many votes can get a majority of the positions in the assembly and has power for the term of this assembly. The people in the district have no control over this ‘representative’ after they elected her/him.

They don’t even come together to decide about this representative. They all vote by secret ballots in neighbourhood centres all over the district. They make a big thing out of the ballots being secret. Angie is the big political scientist, maybe she can explain this to you in more detail, perhaps the reasoning behind it.

They use this system for all of Eastlandia; local, province, and federation. But it is different in the south province. There the people are different, culturally,...the language is a little different..., they have some autonomy from the federation government.

Like over most of Nearth, the economy and everything is a big mess. Everybody is arguing. But Hoodle and her progressive party wants to try progressive ideas to get it all working again. They think there are solutions for everything if everybody is just... reasonable.

So, the Demographic republic and south province Eastlandia came up with an agreement on a joint project. Gassy Greenhouse collective was in charge of the agricultural part of it, so they can grow their own food again, on small farms.

There is also a geothermal project to give the greenhouses heat and generate electric power into their grid. And there is a project to train people in low volume, artisanal light

manufacturing, cheap and to order.

The old line industrial capitalists are still really powerful in Eastlandia and they seriously do not like this. But South province was able to go ahead and we had set up pilots, which went well.

Then the Nickelvirus came on. They had no emergency planning there, so we had to just shut everything down, send the local people home. A core of us stayed to look after things.

We stayed in our compound and in our plants. We got the synthetic antibodies and then the vaccine at the same time as people in 'D'. No one got sick.

But The Nickel hit Eastlandia hard. They had no preparations for any kind of public emergency. They couldn't even get effective quarantine measures going. And you know, The Nickel moves really fast. There was panic, the economy collapsed, people were really starving.

And you know, mother 'D' offered them the synthetic antibody treatment. The Eastlandia Federation stopped it, said it was a security risk, they didn't know it was safe, and so on. So people got sick and died for nothing.

I had only been there a month. I was really worried. The old hands who had been here since the project started, they understood Eastland better. We waited it out until the Easties all calmed down.

But it was scary. People were rioting at the gates to our compound, throwing rocks at our bus. We had good security around us; people from our own G division and local South province police.

The government in South Eastlandia know they need us. They need our aid and technical advice to recover from all the bad government they have had since the disruption. So they stood up to their federation government and the capitalists and we were able to get going again.

But we have all this propaganda against us. D zone is backing radicals and terrorists. We're importing communist methods. They can't understand the difference between communist and socialist.

We invaded NITzone. We created the Nickelvirus and used it on the Northians because we were losing. Then we gave it to them because,...I dunno.

We keep trying to tell them; the governance council of NITzone asked us for help against a, like a coup, by Fraxist people who didn't like the economic treaty the GC signed with us.

The Nickel came from the Northians, who attacked when the NITzone rebels failed. They attacked our army with it, they attacked our civilian population with it. We were well prepared for biowar and we handled it well.

Nickelvirus spread from NITzone all over the world because of people running away from there. Because all these capitalist, private currency countries, they had no preparations for pandemics, they didn't know what to do. In some countries, the business elites demanded that the economy stay full open, like keeping profits flowing is more important than human lives and health.

Fortunately Nickelvirus was not engineered to wipe out everybody. Just to spread quickly and incapacitate a lot of people, create fear and panic. But a lot of old people, infants, people with other medical conditions, died.

And you know it tends to come back at people. New attacks months after their first infection.

Finally we got them to use the vaccines we sent them. Haven't had any more 'Nickel' for months there, but they are in complete shambles. No reason for that. Look here," she waved in an arc around herself "a year after you were hit with it. You're fully recovered.

To try to get their economy going again,

Hoodle tried imitating our demogrant. They really didn't get it right. It prevented starvation, mass homelessness, mass bankruptcy, but they have no way of funding it long term. They have to keep borrowing money. They can't issue their own money, like we do. They depend on the federation.

And their Demogrant is like a bucket with a hole in it. Rent keeps going up, wages keep coming down. They are not recovering.

We were in some negotiations with them. We threatened to pull out because our original agreement was frustrated. All our organizations in the 'raise up' project. The Hoodle government promised to pay to get the projects moving again, to do something about all the obstruction.

But their revenue sources are limited. They have to borrow more from financial capitalists to pay us. Not a good thing in the long run.

The D zone government's using diplomacy with the, ah, the Hoodlists, trying to get them to see their options better. They are trying things, trying to create a more effective government.

They just passed this voting reform initiative. They created a new model of representational legislature. They use this term, legislature, like in law making. Voting would be proportional, meaning, instead of single member districts, you have large districts with several representatives.

Instead of individuals, people vote for a party they want. Each party gets seats in proportion to their vote. So this is supposed to create governments by coalitions; I guess so more than one party is in the government and they have more ideas.

So they will hold new elections under this system. But the capitalist media are still creating all this confusion and people still do not understand what to vote for. I don't know if it will work any better for them.

But at least we are getting food production going there again. We are growing the seed and rootstock for small farmers. We're ready now to

ramp up. We need to bring more staff over.

So there is an opportunity for you Ruthie, if you want to spend at least two years in terrible Eastlandia."

"We still get Demogrant over here? Health care? Housing that's good with income based rent"

"Oh, yes indeed."

Ruthie looked at Angie; "It'll be one heckova adventure. We can save the money for a house of our own. You're going to be spending most of your time over there. Maybe better if I went with you."

Angie nodded thoughtfully.

Thumb; "Ruthie, you were sequestered during the lockdown, were you? You were an essential worker? It didn't bother you to be a little isolated."

"Yeah, we lived in those temporary buildings for six weeks and kept the food going out, kept things running. It wasn't so bad. Everyone had to stay in their own sealed buildings anyway. It least we were busy.

You have full citizenship now, don't you? You've been here three years?"

"Yah. They just asked me to register for the sortition pool."

"They won't call you up for anything while you're living outside the Zone. Angie, you're not eligible for sortition because you work for the government?"

Angie nodded.

"You've come over from NITzone recently, Ruthie, so I think you'll get along well with the Easties. Like, more empathy. They aren't used to working our way. Things are more 'top down' and "follow orders" there, more so than in NITzone."

Ruthie; “This is real interesting but I need to think on it a little.”

“I’m putting out notices tomorrow. Info Vid about the project will be live on the cooperative’s Intranex. I’m interviewing applicants this week. You’re already in if you want it. Are you on shift tomorrow?”

“I’ve put in a “no call” day tomorrow. We’re going into NITzone together to visit some friends. I’m on for the rest of the week. Morning shift.”

“I’ll be at your site most of the week. Assignments office. When you’re ready we can do the paperwork.

Angie, my dear, tell me, how is it going in the NITzone? ”

“I think they’ll be ready to relaunch farming there pretty soon. There’ll be work for ag sector people. We’ve almost wrapped up the transition agreement with the rump Governance Council.”

Thumb; “You think they’re finally going to give in to it?”

“They don’t have much choice. We aren’t going to be able to put up with the situation much longer. It’s all broken up there by war, pandemic, and economic collapse; much worse than Eastlandia. It’s impossible to rebuild because there is no effective government.

Our army and security services are getting tired of having to occupy the place and provide some basic security. Especially when factions of the ruling elite can’t stop agitating people, setting them against each other. Also, keep preventing anything from getting restarted because it might effect their interests.

But the serious flaxists have moved abroad, to Eastlandia and other ‘market’ economies. They still have their agents trying to mess things up there. The remaining, more moderate capitalists and conservatives really do not want the Pan-Nearthians moving back in there.

We are prepared to move out and let the Northians, the Pan-Nearthians move back in, if they do not agree to the transition council and plan. They now understand that.

As for the NITzone beyond the truce line, the Northians are absorbing them into the Pan-Nearthian system. As if Nearth needs any more splazervakky new money or Basic Income schemes, they have set up a system there that is both.

This ‘freedom restoration council’ in power there, they are calling it ‘The Social Dividend’. So it’s The Dividend Zone now, and they are the Dividenders.

People are going to be paid in these ‘common wealth bonds’, based on some sort of calculation of the surplus generated by the economy. These are supposed to circulate like money. But they have to be spent within a certain time limit, or they become worthless.”

Thumb; “I would just as soon they gave out split halves of notched sticks. You know, so they can store the other half so you can prove it’s not a counterfeit stick.

Hm. I do wonder if some ‘genius in his own mind’ has come up with an electronic equivalent to the tally stick...?”

“Not that I’ve heard, so far. But we’ve had to print up a scrip currency and give it out as a form of Basic Income, because the bank transfer system is no longer working in The NIT. And we’re having to distribute basic goods in kind.

That will have to continue until we get basic infrastructure going again over there. Then we are going to do a Demogrant, paid in our DEX. Do it our way, the right way, with a new sovereign currency economy rolling forward.”

Thumb; “I don’t think I will be going there. I’m committed in Eastlandia. It looks like there will be lots of work in NIT zone for The Collective, setting up healthy agriculture.”

Thumb's Blablet beeped at her.

"Ah, my dear Ruthie and Angie, it was opportune to come across you two in this lovely park, but I am off to visit some old friends while I am back here.

I do urge you to take up this challenge, Ruthie. It will be worth it. Goodbye."

"Good chance I will, Thumb." Said Ruthie.

Angie and Ruthie sat quietly a few minutes, watching the gravbop players.

Said Ruthie; "Now I guess it's time to look at this 'urgent' comvec notice, from that migrant camp in NITzone. Fer sure it's about my crazy sister again and fer double sure the answer is still NO!"

Ruthie laid the comvec flat to show she was immobile and the text transmission began.

Angie read the change in Ruthie's expression and emotional state as she read it through several times. Ruthie was silent awhile.

The very next day, in Questionably Located Persons Temporary Non Optional Accommodations Centre number 3A, (QLPTNOAC3A) near the cease fire line in Governance Council continuing administrative zone in Centralia, Planet Nearth, chief underage migrant's assistance officer Wyzie Kase peered down her nose at Ruthie Kazurdle and Angie Bajanji.

She spoke thus; "Ms. Kazurdle, you are the next sister in age to the deceased Handie Kazurdle, so you clearly have the right to have custody of your niece. However, do you think you are up to the demands of being a parent? You were not expecting this."

Ruthie thought for a long minute. She sighed. "I, ...really...don't know. I'll do the best I can. I'm real consterned about the kid being looked after by Berzinda."

Wyzie; "I am well aware of Berzinda's... problems. She is definitely not suitable as a parent. But Kassandra has rights and of course has the final say. She will be here in a moment. Her options will be to

go with you or to be transferred to the child protective service in Demogrant city.

Ms. Bajanji...?"

Angie leaned forward."I will do all I can to help Angie with this, even signing a joint adoption...we are married."

"You are both, on initial examination of your records, excellent candidates for adoption. Thank you for releasing these records..."

A door slid open and a food service trolley was pushed into the room by a food server.

"We will have to put our discussion on hold for about half an hour. Space is limited here and this room is used as a separate dining hall by residents of this facility who are having....problems with some of the other residents."

Some of the residents having problems walked in and took seats at the long table. They looked curiously at Angie and

Ruthie. Angie and Ruthie smiled back.

Angie; "We could wait on those benches outside. It isn't too cold out."

Wyzie; "Here is Cassandra."

A little girl with a backpack stood in the corner of the room, looking about. She noticed Wyzie and walked cautiously toward her. A camp guard in a green uniform trailed her.

"Kassandra, here is Berzinda's older sister, Ruthie. Your other Aunt."

Kassandra looked peevishly at Ruthie. After a moment, she said; "Yer fat! Ya look like somebody squashed yer head."

Kassie spun back toward Wyzie; "I want My Mom back! She's not dead! They took her away somewhere..."

The camp residents who were starting to get their bowls filled with camp cuisine stopped and stared.

Wyzie; "Yes, let's take this outside." She gestured to the camp guard to stay close.

They went outside and sat on the benches in the veranda.

Angie; "We left 'D' zone, it was summer. Here it's still winter. We only came 200 kilometres north."

Wyzie; "Global warming for you."

"Ruthie and Angie. Last people I would expect to see in this strange place."

Angie; "Bev Bombardell. You appear to

be progressing in your new profession.

Here is Kassie Kazurdle, Ruthie's niece. She is one of the smaller war refugees here. She's interviewing us for the job of adoptive parents."

"I want my Real Parent back!"

Bev chuckled. "This is a great development for you two.

I can only talk a few minutes. I'm going on duty.

As for my new profession, it's been a busy year."

Angie; "Sum it up in two minutes or whatever you have."

"Well, as you no doubt heard, we had a war. The Blazebeans, the financialists, tried to overthrow the Governance council here. They called us in. The NITzone army split. Neither faction had much guts for a fight.

We had a tussle with the procoup army faction and the radical militias and had them beat. Then the Northians came in and tried using bioweapons on us. Also nerve gas. They underestimated our biodefence capability. But they turned their Nickelvirus loose on everybody; the civilian population here and seeded it back into 'D' zone. The whole...society back there had to go into quarantine..."

Angie; "Yeah, we noticed."

Ruthie; "It got kinda tiresome after six weeks."

Bev; “Not as tiresome as fighting and working in our chem/biowar suits. It was a pretty rotten war. Enemies that really couldn’t fight but hid behind civilians, destroyed everything they could, left mines, boobies everywhere, squawked for a truce every time we got them pinned. Used that as cover to sneak away.

Their Nickelvirus got loose among their own population, led to some political shakeups there. So they negotiated a ceasefire line and it settled down. They kept probing us for awhile, testing us, sending these shlorking militias over to do sabotage. That’s settled down now, too.

We still have to keep order here and the police here are...we actually have to protect the civvy population from them.

And this camp, radical groups keep trying to take it over, trying to bring guns in. These “Right Men”, guys who think they have a right to have guns to protect themselves from...’tyrannical government’.

The righties keep kidnapping women and trying to force them to be ‘wives’... attack ’n threaten anyone who isn’t one of them...they steal...shake people down... real defenders of freedom!”

Wyzie; “Glad you people are around, Bev. Especially last week when a bunch of ‘em stormed the gate to try to free their friends in here.”

Bev; “They got no guts. But we couldn’t assemble enough people in time.

They’re hung up on guns because they’re cowards who think guns will... compensate, make them feel tough. But...you should’a seen these super aggressive radical feminists, the heenyos, grab the guns right out of their hands. It was a hoot!

But then we had to go and get the guns away from the heenyos.

Exciting afternoon, hey Wyzie?”

Wyzie nodded affirmatively.

Angie; “How did you defence force troops cope with the Northian’s famous artificial Intelligence warfare capabilities?”

Bev snorted. “Lots of fun! We just led ‘em into kill zones and blew ‘em. Sometimes we’d decoy them into killing each other.

We had our remote control vehicles, like with a human operator. That worked a lot better.”

Angie; “You people must really be getting tired, after a year of all this.”

“You bet we are! Know anything about how this transformation agreement is going?”

Angie; “Yeah, quite a lot. I’m involved in preparing the reconstruction plan. I think it’s a done deal. The old government here is kicking about it but they don’t have any choice.”

“Hey, Chief! We’re ready for ya!”

“Stand to!” Shouted Bev, and headed

toward the guard post.

“Take care over here! Come back safe ‘n sound!” Shouted Ruthie after her.

Said Wyzlie; “I’m glad to hear there’s about to be a break in the situation in this zone. We can’t go on indefinitely this way.”

There was a sudden commotion in the dining hall. The veranda sitters turned to look through the window as a woman crashed through the ceiling onto the table in a shower of dust and broken bits.

“YOU’RE. ALL. EATING. A. DEAD. ANIMAL!”

“Hey, security! One of these shlurzin’ heenyos got out of their zone again.”

“Hey, shwank! I hear vegans are real tasty! You’d prob’ly cook up better than this glop you just...contaminated!”

“I. WILL. FIGHT.YOUR SPECIES-ISM, SEXISM,...”

Said Wyzie as she strolled through the door; “Berzinda! Hope this show was worth it! Yer going back into segregation. Loss of all privileges. But first you have a visitor, outside.”

“C’n I get annuder bowl of stew, puhleeze?”

“Yuh. Me too.”

“I REJECT YOUR FLAXIST...I AM BEING SUPRESSED...”

The camp guard took Berzinda by the

arm and waltzed her out the door.

Said Kassie; “Make her go away! She’s crazy.”

Ruthie; “Look, Berzinda, I’m not helping you get into ‘D’ zone. I don’t wanna talk to you, neither.”

“I HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM...TO GO WHERE I PLEASE...BORDERS MUST BE ELIMINATED...!”

Wyzie;”We’ve had this conversation a few times now. That isn’t how internearthian law works. You have the right to receive the necessities of life at a place removed from the threat to your existence. You go home whenever it is safe. There has never been any right to just go wherever you please. Tell that to the other shkranxes in the segregation block.”

“NO ONE IS ILLEGAL!”

Angie; “No one talks in amphiboly.”

“YOU FURXIN’ FLAXISTS ARE DESTROYING NEARTH! CLIMATE DENIERS! YOU PROBABLY CAME HERE IN AN IC CAR, EMITTING CARBON...THE ATMOSPHERE WILL BURN, BURN, BURN...”

Berzinda pounded on a roof post for emphasis, causing a big clump of wet snow to fall on her head. She was briefly preoccupied with picking it out of her collar.

Wyzie gestured to the camp guard, who said, looking around with an air of consternation; “Kassie has

disappeared...”

“Kassie is pretty good at that. She will reappear. Don’t worry. Take care of Aunt Berzinda.”

Guard; “Look, Berzinda, you give me any trouble, yer gonna get trouble, get it? Right around the corner?”

Berzinda growled but said nothing, and was led away around the corner, with one last glare at her sister.

Wyzie sat down on the veranda. “The infirmary is full of these vegan types who refuse to eat properly given limited food availability.

This camp is mostly full of these types of frootzes. Like, there are legitimate refugees, but people like her just can’t get along anywhere. They think the world is persecuting them. They are easily manipulated and used by various malign influences...”

Wyzie paused and peered into her blablet. “Ruthie. You and Berzinda were born and raised in Centralia, not far from this camp. Your mother died...”

“Suicide.” Snapped Ruthie. “Later, Berzinda tried to grab her...stuff. Some property our father left us.”

“Sorry to hear it.

Berzinda joined the ‘L’ zone, Randland. When that went bad she was evacuated into ‘D’ zone. Didn’t settle in there, went back to NITzone, then went to Northia. Didn’t get along there, either. Ended up in the sequestration districts.

In the commotion after the Northian defeat, somehow was given custody of Kassie and tried to get into “D” zone again, on the basis of Kassie being born there.

She could leave this camp at any time, she’s from this zone, but she stays to back her claim to get into ‘D’. Also there’s more food in here, and shelter.”

Wyzie noted Ruthie’s surprised expression and returned to her blablet.

“Handie Kazurdle. Father Hyrumfus Kazurdle. No data on her mother. Born in Northia. Father abandoned this family and went to Centralia. Married your mother. Abandoned this family and is currently on Kranklin island, Frostia.

Handie came to “D’ zone on a scholarship with Panooziam institute of biology. Became an expert on Queezian organisms. Kassie does not seem to know who her biological father is.

In year 18 post disruption...went back to Northia, clearly intending a short visit. Was forbidden to leave.

Early this year, during the disorder in Northia, attempted to cross by teleporter with Kassie into New Ogid, with apparent intention to go from there back to ‘D’ zone. Demolecularized by a mishap with the apparatus. Kassie was unharmed.”

Wyzie looked up again. “So, Kassie lands up here. Berzinda didn’t tell us about you. Told us lies and we were too busy to check things out. This...Eva Squoops, Intelligence Services, tipped

us about you. They take some interest in Handie.

Kassie's been immunized for nickelvirus, with the Northian 'A' vaccine. She's started the type 3 antibody treatment here. She'll finish it in 'D'.

She was in grade three, high value stream, in their Northian education system. No equivalent in our education system. She'll need the transition program into our..."

Some diners had finished and strolled out to the veranda. Said one: "Well, Wyzie, the chow's gettin' a little better here."

"Hi, Snorb. The food supply is slowly improving in governance council zone. We're getting more shipments from The D. Especially, these agricultural collectives, like Gassy Greenhouse..."

Wyzie smiled at Ruthie. Ruthie smiled shyly at Snorb.

Snorb peered at the shoulder patch on Ruthie's jacket. "You work fer them people?"

Ruthie; "We're real busy these days. Lots of places, food has been disrupted by wars and The Nickel.

Once they get the transishernal council set up, a reconstrictern plan going, we'll set up some sites here. Pretty soon there'll be lots to eat up here, includin' in these camps."

Angie; "The transition council just needs final agreement from the old council.

That'll be next week. Then things will start happening fast here. We have the planning done."

Snorb; "They've taken awhile to get this sorted out. What if the old council refuses? A lot of the business people here are still kickin' up a fuss about it."

"The old oligarchy here has been having to get a grip on the idea that their age has passed. The more realistic ones have accepted it. Yet they seem compelled to continue with their interest protecting behaviour; trying to stop anything from being done on any chance it might give their competitors a relative advantage. A lot of them try to have an 'in' with all sides, even ones that are working against them, even trying to destroy them.

Yet most of them have accepted the need for change. They agreed to it with the economic treaty 'D' signed with them last year. They called us in when the extremists rebelled against it.

They've seen that our system works and the Blazebian system in Northia is falling apart. They aren't about to reject us now and bring the Northians back in. Only we can help them to rebuild.

But there are factions in the oligarchy which are extremely ideological. They would rather destroy everything, including themselves, than give in to socialism; an economy planned to meet human needs. We've had to defeat them militarily and politically.

We've disarmed and sequestered the

rival paramilitary groups they tried to build among the population. But most of the population remains very factionalized and confused. We think that will resolve once reconstruction starts, an economy gets going, and we can finally shut down these internex “information” silos.

Of course, the G.C. could reject the new treaty and order us to leave, or keep holding out for more concessions. In which case we will simply leave and let them deal with the Northians. In which case it will likely get very bad for ordinary people in this zone. To know how bad, you just have to look at the conditions in the Northian zone of occupation of the old Centralia, what they’re starting to call ‘Dividend Zone’.

So that’s how it sits now.”

Snorb; “What if you just moved all the people who want to live under socialism into the ‘D’ zone?”

“Yes, socialism is terrible but everyone is now trying to escape free enterprise countries and get into ‘D’ zone. But we can’t just instantly absorb all that surplus population. What we do is try to support transitions to social economies organized to meet human needs.”

Wyzie; “You came down here from Northia, didn’t you?”

Snorb: “It was gettin’ real hard to live there. This ‘Social Dividend’ system they put in there, it made things even worse.

In this here camp, it’s at least better than outside right now. So I stay here, even

with the trouble with these... fanatics. If you won’t join them, they...”

He waved his arm at the other diners settling onto the veranda.”We’re the non-faction faction.”

Several of them smiled and waved.

“Let’s get the Demogrant here!” One of them said.

Snorb laughed softly and then his face grew serious again. “Who are these ruling elite factions that’re causin’ all this trouble?”

“There are two significant factions, tendencies, in the ruling classes. There are the industrial capitalists; the people who make money by exploiting workers to extract surplus value. The general term we use for them is “The Laizifarians” after the Laizifar institute.

And there are the financial capitalists, who get their money by owning things or just by printing money. We usually call ‘em the Blazeblans, after the old Blazeblan brotherhood. But I think we are dealing with successors to the old Blazeblans, these days.

Both of these groups see us as a kind of cow herd. The Laizifarians talk about ‘profits’ or more recently ‘value’. They think profits can be expanded indefinitely by expanding, or increasing the efficiency of, their human herd. They can’t accept any idea of limits. Anyone or anything contradicting them is ‘communism’ which they will try to annihilate. They are very stupid but their fanaticism and aggressiveness gives them a lot of power.

The Laizifarians are less dangerous than the more tightly organized Blazebeans. These are the financial capitalists, the ones who talk about “yields”. They make yields by owning land, utilities, communications, anything that people need in order to live. Or, by just owning banks and printing whatever money they want.

Blazebeans very much understand the idea of limits. This is why they see the human herd as competition for limited resources and as potentially getting out of their control. Thus they want a one world government so they can reduce the world population and to make sure they stay in control forever.

Blazebeans are cunning, but have serious gaps in their understanding of reality. They will try to co-opt any opposition, but they will also kill if they think they are losing control.

As I said, the more realistic capitalists have figured out that these Ideas are ultimately suicidal but have trouble breaking away from the fanatic factions. We have had to show that we can offer protection. We aren't going to grab all their wealth.”

Snorb; “How did you ‘D’ zone people come about?”

“Well...you remember The Great Disruption and the Basic Income wars? That was partly about the industrialists finally overrunning Nearthian resources and blaming the Blazebeans when their system broke down. And about the Blazebeans trying to consolidate their

one world government.

They started fighting each other and the resulting chaos enabled some socialist and conservative polities, states, to become established. So here we are.

You come here from Northia. That's a Blazebean stronghold. How's it going there?”

“Everything goin' bad since the war and The Nickel. No work. We have this “Funny Money”. They call it ‘common wealth bonds’. They're giving it out now in their half of the old Centralia.

It's supposed to be like, our share of the economy. They say this is a better way of giving out a Basic Income. So each certiferket was five hundred share points. You get it every month. You tear off these ten and fifty point coupons. Except now it's only three hundred points.

You have to spend it all by the end of the month. You can only spend it in certain places. Some things, you can't spend them on.

And you get these rent vouchers. They force you to live in certain areas, usually where there ain't no work.”

Angie; “That's the Blazebean version of a Basic Income. ‘Maintain’ surplus people out of the way somewhere until they can be ‘reduced’ or gotten rid of entirely.

I hear they have a brilliant system of direct democracy up there.”

Snorb laughed. “Electronical voting. You get to poke a screen for all sorts of

silly things; should the cop cars be painted blue or yellow? But not about whether there should be so many cops.

And all kinds of weird stuff no one can make no sense of. But what the gover'mint wants, they always get. Nobody shows how the votes get counted up."

Wyzie; "We're starting to get cold out here. Lets move back inside."

They moved back inside and sat down at one end of the table. The server had finished cleaning up and was wheeling her cart out.

Wyzie asked her; "Did everybody get enough?"

"Barely. No thanks to that spranxer! Spoiling good food...these times..."

Ruthie checked her comvec. "Our secure transport detail says we have to leave by 1300 hours or we'll be late for your meeting with Barb Wonkle."

Angie; "Barb knows our problem. She's giving us some slack. Jilly and Moe won't mind an extra hour playing video games in the guard's canteen."

Wyzie; "I think they're swapping war stories with the off duty guards.

It depends on Kassie, but I think you'll be leaving soon."

Ruthie looked out the window across the compound at two groups of camp inmates trading insults across a temporary fence. "Where are these people from?"

Wyzie; "All over Nearth. Anywhere there is disruption of normal life, which is just about everywhere. We've sealed the frontiers now, stopped the flow. But how did they get here? Somebody is helping them. Why? That is an interesting question.

Three basic causes. One is social dumping. Failing oligarchies want to dump their high cost, low value population onto someone else.

Following on that is weaponized mass migration. Try to empty out whole areas, send the people to states regarded as enemies, to try to break their economy.

And we have plain old human trafficking. For prostitution. For slave labour. The shreezin', glutzie traffickers who try to posture like they are doing something noble, upholding freedoms, are enough to make you...

We've been able to separate out the trafficked people, get them into special camps, try to explain to them how to live. Like, they are not worthless, they shouldn't let themselves be traded like cattle.

And we are getting most of the traffickers into special camps. Real special camps.

Most of these people, if they capable of fitting into society, we will settle here once we get the economy going again. The bad brains; the criminals and crazies, we will try to send them back to whoever sent them.

But we are concerned here with a certain very small refugee.”

Kassie; “My Mom’s in New Ogid! I want to go to New Ogid!”

Wyzie; “New Ogid is a big place.”

“I’ll make them tell me where she is!”

“They’ll just tell you what they’ve told us. She’s been demolecularized in a teleporter accident.”

“I don’t believe them. She was right there...!”

“They don’t care if you don’t believe them.

You have two options now, Kassie. You can go with Aunt Ruthie or we’ll send you to the child support service in the ‘D’ zone.”

“I don’t want to go to ‘D’ zone. They’re all communists there.”

“You aren’t staying here much longer.”

“The food here tastes like dog slobber! The kids in the kids’s block are all stupid and weird! It’s cold and smelly there! There’s nothing to do!”

“So you’ll find the cuisine, company, accommodations and entertainment all much superior in ‘D’ zone.”

“I don’t want to go with Aunt Ruthie. What if she’s crazy, too?”

“I promise I am not going to give you up to any more crazy aunts. So come out from under the table.”

At the far end of the table a chair was skootched back. A back pack was plopped onto the seat. Kassie clambered up on top of that and sat, scowling at Ruthie.

“I think you should give Aunt Ruthie a try. If it doesn’t work out child support will come and get you. They’ll find someplace else for you.

Child support in ‘D’ zone is not like the booboo mommie cops in Northia. They don’t do things without good and just reasons.”

“Will you take me to New Ogid?”

Ruthie thought for a moment. “No, I can’t do that.

Kassie, your Mom is gone. If you don’t want to believe that, there’s nothing I can do to make you believe it.

I’m not crazy...

I know what it’s like to...lose yer Mom... when yer real young...in a real bad way.

I’ll do everything I can for you...

This gets kinda emotional fer me...and...”

Angie had a Snortex tissue ready under the table. She said; “Kassie, I will do everything I can to help you and Ruthie. Ruthie and I, we’ve been together for a few years now. We have a good thing going and there’s room for you in it.”

Outside, they could faintly hear a crazed speech about the human right to a Basic Income.

Secure movement trooper Jilly listened to reports on her earbug as she steered the light armoured people mover over the damaged road leading to Angie's appointment at the Pareto Institute. She announced; "Highway nine is open again. We should be able to make your appointment in time."

Angie; "No need to push it. They know we might be a bit late."

Kassie Kazurdle asked; "Are these people from the communist secret police?"

Angie smiled at Secure movement trooper Moe. "It takes awhile to get over all the propaganda they get in Northia."

Moe smiled back from his swing seat at the back. "People in this zone are full of it too. They can't really help it but...its a bad thing."

Angie; "What we have here is usually called the intelligence services or departments 'F' and 'G'. The unique thing about them is they're here to protect us from the bad people. They don't protect the bad people from us. Like in Northia."

Kassie addressed Jilly; "Why are we driving around in this big tank thing? Don't you have self-drive cars here?"

Jilly; "Self drive doesn't handle bad roads like this very well. We don't need to break a wheel out here. Also it's internal combustion powered. Not many charge stations out here."

Angie; "Don't distract them. They're on the job, need to be watching all around us."

Kassie; "Somebody might blow us up?"

Angie chuckled; "It could happen. Hasn't happened much lately. But government people like us have to travel with special protection when we're outside the secure zones. Some people still don't like us."

Kassie thought a moment; "So you get protection even when you're doing personal stuff?"

"Like coming and getting you? Yes, I have family and personal relations in the zone, so I'm allotted three units a month of secure movement service."

Sometimes I have to mix some personal business with government business. You are personal business. We going now to do some government business. After that we are going somewhere that's a mix of personal and government."

Ruthie; "It'll all be real educational for you. But it's gonna be a long day. Did you have enough to eat at the camp? We packed lots of food for this trip."

Kassie noticed she was becoming hungry and hummed affirmatively.

Ruthie opened a pack and served a snack.

Kassie; "This stuff is good. What is it?"

Ruthie; "They're called Yumwiches. Got lots of 'em. We got lots of good food in 'D' zone. We have a nice place to live. I can buy you some real nice, warm clothes, too." Ruthie smiled earnestly.

"You guys want a Yumwich?" she said, thoughtfully."

"We brought our own rations. Thanks." Said Moe.

The vehicle was silent while Kassie ate. Angie presented a nutrijuice pack, which Kassie consumed and praised.

Angie; "What kind of school in that camp?"

"We had sort of a school. A teacher would

come in a few times a week and give us stuff to do. It's hard to learn much there."

"When was the last time you were in regular school?"

"Til the day before we went away. Me and my Mom. We packed up the night before and left real early in the morning. Mom didn't want anybody to see us."

"Where did you go after your Mom vanished?"

"I went to this police place and they asked me lots of questions about where my Mom was going. They were real scary.

Then I went to the quarantine place. At first I was in a ward with these mean and dirty kids from the low income countries. Their parents just told them to go by themselves to Northia. They picked on me because I was from Northia. Some of them didn't even know how to talk right.

Then a nurse put me in with some grown up people who were nice to me. They were from Centralia. They were trying to get away from the war.

Then Berzinda came and they made me go with her. So we went to these camps full of more people who are always mad about everything. We kept moving to new camps.

Then...we had to walk all night through the woods. It was cold and rainy. Then these soldiers got us and took us to camp 3A.

Berzinda kept hittin' me and yellin' at me. I dropped a brick on her head. Wyzie said Berzinda couldn't look after me any more and she was gonna try to find somewhere else for me.

I had to stay with more mean kids. But Wyzie asked some big kids to make them leave me alone."

Ruthie; "Well, I grew up with Berzinda. She was a real... bad sister. Our Mom didn't have

much money.

But things are lots better for me now. I met Angie. We're in 'D' zone now. It's a great place. I got a good job and enough money. You can go to school with nice kids again..."

"You're both girls and you're married to each other."

"Yes."

"That's weird."

Angie; "Yes, it's weird. But it works well for us.

Do you think you can accept this, Kassie?"

Kassie thought a moment, then shrugged. "Yah, guess it don't matter.

Ruthie, you work someplace where they grow food inside?"

Ruthie's head bobbed affirmatively.

"Angie, you work for the government in 'D' zone, right?"

"Yes. Mostly I write reports for our friend, Bard Wonkle. We're going to meet her."

Ruthie; "We'll be talkin' big grownup government business, so you'll have to stay quiet or go outside."

Kassie sat pensively for a little while. She suddenly said; "You're communists, right?"

Angie; "No. We are not communists. There aren't many real communists around anymore. We're socialists. Just about everybody in 'D' zone are socialists now."

"I thought socialism and communist were the same thing."

"It takes some explaining but there are big differences. The simple definition of socialism is the organization of society to meet the needs instead of everybody, not just a privileged

class.

Communists want to do this by having government own everything and control everything. Socialists have more...flexible... ideas.”

Ruthie; “And we didn’t start the war and we didn’t cause Nickelvirus!”

Kassie; “My Mom thought Nickelvirus...But she said don’t tell anyone because it’ll get us in trouble.”

Angie; “Saying it won’t get you in trouble here. But your Mom was very smart.

She said the Northian army created the Nickelvirus, right?”

Kassie was silent.

Angie briefly explained the origins of the Centralian war.

Once she had the permanent ceasefire in effect and the Nickelvirus controlled, Kassie asked her; “What did they use the Nickelvirus for? It hurt them more than you.”

“Those people do a lot of things that don’t make sense. It seems they thought they could control it, keep it out of Northia. They had vaccinated their army and government, all their economic elite. But they didn’t have the capacity to make more vaccine quickly, for everyone else.

They underestimated how fast we could create synthetic antibodies and then a vaccine, and immunize our whole population. We did it in six weeks.

But the Nickelvirus got out of Centralia and went all over Nearth. We did what we could to help people, but we could not make enough antibody for every body on Nearth. And a lot of people believed the Blazeb...the Northian propaganda that we had spread the virus.

The virus is still not eradicated, dead. There are still flareups in places. Immunity can wear off so

you need to keep taking your antibody treatment. Okay?

It’s a good thing it wasn’t made to kill a lot of people, just make them sick all at once. But for old people, people with other medical problems, it can kill them.”

Kassie; “What did you and Ruthie do before they got the anterblodies, uh, vaccines?”

Ruthie; “The whole ‘D’ zone was locked down for those six weeks. We had real good emergency plans, in case we got attacked by...somebody.

It wasn’t just against the virus. We had to get sealed off from poison gas attack. Most of our buildings are made for that.

The Northians tried using nerve gas in the war but it didn’t work good for them. We was scared they would try it on cibilians.

I went to the greenhouse where I worked. We all lived inside it for the whole time, all us greenhouse people. We kept everything running and sent out fresh food for everybody.

Angie stayed in our building. No one could leave. She worked from home.”

Angie; “There was a room in our apartment building where they brought in everything we needed, that we had ordered for that day. They sterilized it and then we came in and got it.

It was really amazing. Everybody stayed in their own pods. There was no way for the virus to be passed on. Yet everything important kept running. When it was over everything that was shut down started up again where it left off. ”

“What about people who didn’t want to do that. Like, said it was against their...their rights?”

Angie; ”Those kind of people can cause a lot of problems. They made the pandemic a lot worse in a lot of places. In ‘D’ zone they just got put in jail until it was over.”

“What about people who didn’t want to be vaccinated?”

Ruthie; “Ya can’t vaccer...vaccinate...nobody against their will. A few people in ‘D’ zone didn’t wanna. It don’t matter because most people did get immunized. So, they’re free to let themselves get sick but they can’t make nobody else sick.”

“The vaccine ’n antibodies didn’t cost you nothing?”

“Whew! I’m glad I don’t live in Northia. In ‘D’ all health care, dentalistry, drugs, it’s all free. That’s what socialism’s about.”

“In Northia, the teacher said if you have this ‘Demercrant’ you can’t have anything else free.”

“Teachers in Demogrant zone say, if ya don’t have capitalism then there’s enough money for everything people need. Even to go to our schools for free.

Also, I can get an extra eight hundred DEX a month fer lookin’ after you. So I can buy ya lots of stuff.”

Angie; “Actually, that’s only when you’re on maternal leave. For her, she’ll be in school, so it’s four hundred. Plus a school expenses grant. Still a pretty good deal, Kassandra.

Also, I think we can get a one time grant to buy stuff for you, like a bed and clothes. We’ll have to apply for a bigger apartment, with a room for

you. That might take awhile.

Did your Mom have you in a day care? Or what did you do when she was at work?”

“No, I just went home after school and let myself in. Mom came home later.”

Ruthie; “In the ‘D’ zone there’s an after school program. You can stay there ’til I get off work. Lotsa women who work with me have kids in that. They say it’s real good.”

Kassie said suddenly; “I need to stop at a rest stop. Pretty soon.”

Ruthie; “The rest stops out here have mostly been shut down. Can you wait another half an hour?”

“I dunno.” Said Kassie dubiously.

Jilly; “We’re outside the red zone now. I think it’s safe to stop. There’s some bushes ahead.”

“Bushes?” Asked Kassie.

Jilly smiled; “Yes, I’ll teach you an old girl soldier’s trick.”

Ruthie; “Maybe you’ll grow up and become a girl soldier too. Or a security services agent?”

Kassie thought a moment. “No.”

The door slid open.

“Hello, Angie. You ready to present your report? Ruthie! How have you been? This is your new...dependant?” Said Bard Wonkle as she stood up from her chair at the head of a conference table in the Pareto Institute building.

Angie laid her comvec on the table and began pulling her coat off. “Hi Bard. I’m

ready.

Here is Ruthie’s niece, Kassie Kazurdle. I think, ah, whether she becomes a dependant of ours is dependent on her. I mean, what she decides. She can stay with us...

Kass, this is Bard Wonkle. She’s an old

friend of me and Ruthie. She's a big government person."

Bard; "Hello, Kassie. Angie messaged me a little about you. It seems like you've been through a rough time."

Kassie; "Are you a red commander?"

Bard smiled at Ruthie and looked back at Kass. "Yes, I'm a red commander. You can stay and watch me do some red commanding, and see how that works. But you have to be quiet.

Actually though, I mostly do red convincing because that usually works better."

Kassie slipped behind Ruthie and looked apprehensively around the room. Ruthie sat down and Kassie remained standing behind her.

Nayla Plankitt smiled tensely at Kassie from across the table. "Hello, Kassie. I remember your Aunt and her friend from before the... hostilities. They had some difficulties with the...certain quasi official groups...at that time. Angie was detained briefly.

Uh..., I think that what we are discussing here today will lead to a more peaceful future for young people such as yourself."

Kassie crouched down behind Ruthie so the people at the table could not see her.

Plankitt; "Young people are very... suspicious these days..."

Stort Harward; "I am not sure if Ms. Bajanji should be bringing her whole

family to these discussions."

Angie; "They can wait outside if you want."

Bard; "We are not discussing anything confidential here. I generally like people to see how public business gets done. All we are here to do is review the reconstruction plans as per chapter three of the final transition agreement. We have two hours scheduled.

I think you also want to lobby me about making some last minute changes. I can pass on your concerns but I don't think any further changes are Likely.

Also, it seems that Spermon will not be attending, again. Or any representative for the eco-socialist awareness coalition."

Harward; "That's not surprising. It seems the...that kind of 'Reds' have been thoroughly defeated here.

I hope we will be able to preserve the principles of private property and rule of law, respect for entrepreneurship and... Even in a less than ideal situation."

Bard; "Oh, I think private property will be safe in this new situation. People who have made their wealth In legitimate ways, have avoided committing speculation and politics, tax evasion, have made out okay in socialist economies like Demogrant zone and even in Squoozia.

They have been able to preserve their estates and pass on a good part of them to descendants. It's mostly

financial capitalists whom we have ended up having to expropriate. Industrial capitalism, it tends to be rooted to a place and learns to operate by the local rules. Or they just sell off.

You know a lot of them have been content to be expropriated with compensation, a permanent income that declines over several generations. It carries them over the shock of no longer being the ruling class.”

Harward; “As long as these arrangements remain enforcable...”

Bard; “I think we have enough incentives to keep our side of the bargain. It’s a lot easier to get ruling elites in other states to concede political power if they have assurance there will be a life for them after socialism. So it’s easier to spread socialism, which increases our own security.

Besides, you people have a lot of entertainment value. No, really. We can still watch you racing your yachts and jumping your horses. The misadventures of your kids helps keep the tabloids in business.

All these activities are by themselves no strain on the economy. The damage wealthy people can cause is by their efforts to stay in control, to protect their own interests at the expense of the larger society.”

Plankitt; “Yes, you do have real security concerns. They have become our concerns too. The new financialists do not like all these new sovereign currency states that are...arising. I mean really do

not like. They don’t like us either, for compromising with you.

What do we call them? The Blazebian Brotherhood or their successors?The PanNearthians. The Mediceller group?”

“We have been using the term ‘Mediceller’. This bunch are based in New Ogid and seem to be the governance core of the neofinancialists. They screen their moves very well.”

Plankitt; “Well, their idea that manufacturing can be done anywhere, so they are going to move it to where they have control over it, their own so called ‘innovation zones’; that leaves us out in the cold. Like you said, old fashioned industrialists like us are based locally. It is usually impractical for us to just pick up and move.

Also we can’t compete with people who are in with the local Baz..Medicellers... whatevers...and can get zero interest loans from people who can just print money...

Stort..., His brother just negotiated a zero interest loan from one of the “D” zone development banks, to get his machine works running again, and modernize it.”

Bard; “Yes, we can ‘print money’, too. The trick is to get it to where it’s needed.”

Stort Harward nodded.

Two men had been sitting silently, observing. One now spoke up, wryly smiling. “So, that’s how capitalism ends? With the capitalists pleading for

protection from something even worse than themselves?”

Plankitt snickered nervously. “Yes, Mister Wonkendip. I do think we all need protection from the Medicellers. I am very concerned about these people’s intentions. From some discussions I have had with our friend Mister Spermon, I think there is some credibility to the accusation that their ultimate aim is a mass depopulation of Nearth.”

Bard; “We are worried about all the fissile material that walked away from the ‘nuclear graveyards’ here. It’s bad enough they have resurrected chemical and biologic weapons. If they are trying to create nuclear ones again...yeetch!

Well, I think we should get this started. Red convincing is happening here, we hope. We have three presenters of aspects of our transition and rebuilding plans for this zone, to be called, The Provisional Territory of South Central Centralia. The problems are considerable.

Stook Harfenist will present about infrastructure; housing, utilities, transportation, communication. This will be a big job. However, much of your infrastructure was obsolete or run down even before the conflict and needed rebuilding.

The new governance system will get all these obstructive approval processes out of the way so we can get on with it. We will no longer have ‘interest protectors’ using these procedures to block anything they do not get a cut of, or which might reduce their own profits,

threaten their dominance, and so on.”

Stook smiled and nodded ‘hello’ to Plankitt and Harward.

“Herm Wonkendip will review our plans for economic recovery. We need to rebuild and upgrade physical plant, so as to begin delivering essential goods and services. However, a big problem will be a shortage of technical and managerial talent, which was growing acute even before the...

We will continue subsidies to key businesses and people to keep them in place. We have started two new development banks to provide capital. Supply chains will be built back up.

Now, our friend Angie will explain how we will develop a Demogrant system that will allow people to live and to restart consumer demand.

It will be modelled after our own arrangements in ‘D’, but we will not be able to launch it just yet. The destroyed infrastructure means we have difficulty getting the money to the people and there is little for them to buy with it. We will continue to use a paper currency for awhile. And, continue direct delivery of some staple goods.

A tax system won’t matter until there is a surplus to tax, and to prevent... imbalances.

But before this we have to assemble the needed data to be able to design these programs. That will require a census and registry.

I will ask Angie to go first. She has some further business to attend to before her day is done.”

Angie gave a “Hi. I’m on now” smile as she slid a datastik™ into the holoprector™ at the centre of the table. It quickly flashed through her presentation deck.

“Good evening, Stort and Nayla. Happy to meet you again...”

Harward; “Angie, the thing about your plans which is causing some concern is the very detailed data collection and likely infringement on privacy, civil liberties...”

“I think you will find that the people doing the most squawking about government data collection are fine with private interests building private data bases on everyone which are far more extensive than what we are doing. Their problem is they just do not want public government to function.

We can’t design and deliver good public services without good information. With a Demogrant, we really have to know where everybody is and their situation.

The information collected by your old income tax system was not adequate to the purpose.

So, step one will be to build a registry of households. Given the state of things in the soon to be ‘PTSCC’, it is going to be a big job.

As for privacy; in ‘D’ zone everyone has to be registered. The simple fact is that people who want to live ‘off the grid’ are usually either crooks or have mental problems.

But everyone can examine their file. We can all just go to the public records office and prove we are us, and we examine our files, correct wrong information.

Start Deck!”

The title page of Angie’s presentation apparitioned over the ‘prector and could be seen face-on from every angle in the room.

Kassie came from behind Ruthie and sat on the floor to view it.

Kassie was asleep with her head on Ruthie’s lap as Moe wheeled his light armoured people mover in front of the lobby of the former Van Parijs economic housing complex. It was dark and most lights were knocked out. He slid the door open and Jilly hopped out, looked around briefly, and entered the lobby.

She was met by another security trooper. He said; “Hi, movement. Lafter, 62 company, occupation police. There’s two of us. We’re here to deal with some SoPro types getting ‘private’; as usual.”

“Hi, Lafter. 99 secure movement. We

got a class three on some semi official business here. She decided to bring her whole fratzin' family with her. She brought some... presents for friends in here.

At least this place is less shot up than most around here. You need more lighting.

Where do we park our old clanker?

By the way, I'm Jilly, my partner is Moe."

"Hey, Jilly. Right over there, so we can watch it from the security room. Lots of room to park out here.

But it's crowded inside. People doubling up with friends. Loser management, loser SoPros trying to either shake 'em down or evict 'em. Usual shlorp."

From behind Lafter came Zoomie Whacker, saying; " Angie! Ruthie! I got the survey for you. There was good cooperation from people here.

Who's your little guest?"

Ruthie and Angie laid heavy packages on a table in the lobby. Ruthie stepped to one side to give them a clear view of Kassie. Kassie moved close to Ruthie, looking about her warily.

"This is my niece, Kassie Kazurdle. She's gonna stay with us for a little while; long while, I hope. We got her at one of them...camps, this mornin'. Her mother died in Northia. It's kind of a story...

Kass, this is our old friend Zoomie Whacker. She's head of the resident's

committee in here now. Me'n Angie used to live in this building. We met here."

While Kassie and Zoomie exchanged hellos, three more building residents followed Zoomie and picked up the packages. The elevator indicators glowed in the gloom with the dismal information that the elevators were disabled and that the building had 24 floors.

Zoomie; "Take them upstairs quickly. Try not to attract attention. You don't want to attract envy or...raids."

"Right, Zooms." said Flo Floogle as she hefted one of the packages. Welcome, welcome, Ruthie and Angie. Come on up."

Angie; "Ruthie, you and Kass go up. I'll be maybe an hour with Zoomie."

"AWRIGHT! WHAT'S IN THOSE PACKAGES? STOP! NOW!" Blootus Bonk leaped from a side door of the lobby.

"Here's the trouble I was telling you about." Said trooper Lafter to Jilly as he jumped between Bonk and the residents.

Jilly jumped to prevent Bonk from trying to move around Lafter.

"LISTEN! WE HAVE STANDING ORDERS TO INSPECT ALL DELIVERIES INTO THESE BUILDINGS. THIS IS NOT EVEN COMING FROM THE REGULAR AID DELIVERIES, WHICH ARE IMPROPER..."

Lafter; "You shlorpdwangs give yourself

orders to loot whatever you want from the aid packages. But we got real orders. I won't tell you twice to back off."

Ruthie, Kassie, Flo, the two other friends and the two packages moved speedily into the stairwell and out of the scene.

Moe ran in. Lafter's assistant, Trooper Luv, arrived from elsewhere in the building, reholstering her pistol as she appraised the threat level.

Bonk's only reinforcement was Inspector Torkie Mada, who arrived through the same door. They could only screech impotently about their authority being interfered with, which came from the governance council, which was still the authority, which the occupation authority could not override without authority, and etc.

While they squawked, Angie held up her comvec for the two SoPros to see. "Okay, I have some orders of my own to give out.

Under interim order FU92, section B4, this building is under extra special protection as the site of a really special research program related to sort of special governance planning. All regular Centralia police services are barred from this site unless specifically requested. Special occupation police will be directed to assume full time responsibility for policing in this complex.

Authorized by Bard Wonkle, commissioner for governance liaison

activities, social services section, occupation authority."

Angie tapped the order into Zoomie's blablet. "I'm sure that'll come in handy."

Torkie furiously sputtered that the order was not legal, the governance council was still the legal authority and had not delegated to the occupation authority on this matter, etc. Nonetheless, she and Bonk were quickly hustled out of the building.

"Communist tyranny!" She shouted without much conviction as the lobby door closed on her.

Zoomie; "Just what we have been needing around here. These frantzers have been getting..."

She turned and walked toward her office. Angie followed.

"They ally themselves with every corrupt force around that wants to victimize everyone. Looking for their cut. There's this food inspection scam; they try to claim they have to inspect all food aid to make sure it complies with various rules, they seize stuff and then sell it... then try to charge fees for inspecting..."

Angie; "In a few weeks they will have no further pretence to authority. Also no salary. I would bet that in a few months they will be in their own jail.

Are the housing authority contractors still trying to extort rent here?"

Zoomie turned the corner into the building office. "They seem to have

given up on that. They don't even show up here anymore. But there is still no maintenance. The heating has stopped. The power goes off at eleven and we go on batteries and a few generators."

"The moratorium on rent meant exactly that. They have been given subsidies to do basic upkeep. When we get the transition plan in effect we are going after these people, find out what happened to that money."

"When is the new government coming into force?"

"I think they will be signing it next week. It'll come into effect immediately."

"Pickett and Stryker have been looking for you. Want to bend your ear some more about it."

"Did they give another one of their talks at the aid delivery session? How did that go, anyway?"

"They did, briefly, but people are tired of hearing about it. The Negative Income Tax was not working. People here would be really starving without food packages and cash from the Demogranters. Everyone wants you 'D-granters' to just take over.

It went real smooth today. The trucks even arrived on time. There is more food, it's getting more edible, so people are happy. Even ones without friends from the 'D'."

She flashed a "be only slightly offended, please" smile.

"The cash distribution went well, too.

People are taking your scrip as money. We can buy stuff from the vendors who come around.

Our friends Luv and Lafter kept Bonk and Mada at bay. The Rightie Boys don't come around here anymore. The Anarchists have moved out.

People are getting it that there is no point in trying to game us. Or trying to hide behind proxies. The hand held facial recognition gear is handy. We don't get this 'Can I get an extra box for my cousin Shmerg over on Aberhart Avenue? He can't come here because...'

And..."

Zoomie pulled a box from under her desk and laid it before Angie.

"Your questionnaires have got a very good response. Over ninety percent. I hope it's useful."

Angie began looking over the bundles of cards. "It will be. We need this as a pilot for a more detailed survey of the whole zone. Doing a big project like that, you need to first refine your questions, test your methodology.

Oh, Fratz! I'm about to get lobbied again."

Gomper Pickett and Melodie Stryker walked into the office.

Zoomie; "I can ask them to leave..."

"Nyah, I'll give them five minutes.

Hi, Moe."

Moe stuck his head in the door. "Ruthie and friends are in their apartment and feel secure. We've set up an emergency ping with them but we'll wait in this security room next door. You're staying in here?"

"I'll be here for maybe a half hour, hour...then join them upstairs."

"We'll be enjoying a little Luv and Lafter with our fellow security forces troopers.

We have to leave by 2300 hours so we're back at depot by zero hours. Or the mover turns into a pumpkin."

From the security room Jilly shouted; "Actually, a more mundane vegetable. And we turn into potatoes for a week.

Hey, you guys play any speed chess?"

Said Angie; "Hello again, Gomper and Melodie. Let's go into this side room to talk."

Said Gomper; "We have to find ways to get through to the people drafting this transformation agreement. They are making a fundamental mistake."

"Bard is not interested in being a channel for you, nor am I. I think the great error is set in place. In a couple of years, if it all turns out to be a mistake, we can revisit it."

They sat down at a battered table in a room with a single flickering light fixture. Several round holes in the wall were covered by Stikki-snug™ sheeting.

Stryker; "We need the income tax

system restarted so we can pay a Negative Income Tax. Our whole social service system here is set up around that. You won't have money to pay for reconstruction otherwise."

Angie; "You persist with the fallacy of reification regarding money. We do not need to tax in order to get the money to operate. It would be futile right now anyway. There is nothing to tax. The economy in the old NIT zone of Centralia is in total collapse.

But to fund emergency relief measures, reconstruction, relaunch of industry, we can just issue money based on the power of a sovereign state to issue its currency. Once we have an economy going again, we will need to start a tax system for the real purpose of taxes; to prevent concentration of wealth and to keep the money supply stable."

Gomper; "But that is fiat money. It isn't backed by anything. It won't be accepted in interearthian trade, which we will need. Plus you cannot raise enough money from the wealthy. You have to have a middle class which can pay taxes. This is what gives a currency exchange value. It is needed to pay taxes with. To repay interest with."

Angie; "We are going to use the same monetary system here that we have proved in the Demogrant zone. There will be no private banks, and no interest charges. Development loans will come from public development banks and will carry only flat handling charges.

As in 'D' zone, we will balance currency distribution and recover excess currency

by wealth taxes, business taxes, and throughput taxes. By middle class you mean the real working class and we will keep the burden of financing everything off them. That was the basic failure of the system you ran here.”

Gomper; “It worked beautifully for a very long time. We got an economy going. We created plenty of well paid jobs through unionization. The working people paid taxes and funded social programs for the few who could not...

We forced wages up and enabled workers to pay even more taxes. It paid for everything, for good quality infrastructure, education...

The wealthy were left alone so they could fund private development, invest in new industry. We did not drive investment away by taxing them.”

“It worked well for some people for awhile. What you had was a way of grinding the economy into the ground over time. As wages kept going up, fewer jobs and fewer businesses were viable under capitalism. The wealthy stopped investing. They began speculating, especially in housing, driving living costs up.

The approach of your old unions was totally backwards. To increase living standards and equality, to strengthen the economy, you need to drive living costs down, not drive wages up. Cheap labor yet steady, not excessive, consumption; that makes strong businesses and a strong economy, with competitive exports.

That, and eliminating banking and

interest and developing participatory economic planning.”

“But that’s just a policy of cheap labor, exploiting workers to increase profits. I don’t think workers really participate in this participative planning. They need strong union representation.”

“Workers in ‘D’ are quite happy with being cheap but prosperous labor. Unions have been transformed there; they are more internally democratic and a big part of the sectoral planning process.

What matters is not squeezing everything possible out of The Bosses. It is about the overall quality of life; total income and what you can buy with it, what you get as a right. And reasonable and stable hours of work.”

Stryker struck up again; “But under capitalism, the point of economic activity is to extract the maximum value from workers. Will not the Demogrant simply be used to pay lower wages and increase profits?”

“Yes, under capitalism that is what happens. That’s why you can’t have a Demogrant, or any kind of Basic Income, under capitalism.”

Stryker; “But your system still has many features of capitalism. Businesses still make profits, try to maximize profits.”

“In ‘D’ zone, and in the future Centralia transition zone, profit is normalized. That is, businesses make enough to justify continuing. Small businesses make enough to return a decent living to their

owners. Big businesses reinvest in new technology, new equipment, and maintain a systemic surplus.

The focus is on long term viability. Nothing is run in order to return large dividends to a class of shareholders, rentiers, investors. Entrepreneurs can still get rich if they do it in ways that benefit the whole society.

By the way, in the works at Pareto institute are a set of texts and pamphlets, explainers, about how the Demogrant based economy works, and how our economic plan in this zone will work.

But I am puzzled that people who are supposedly committed unionists, for the working people, adopt all the assumptions behind capitalist economics.”

Stryker; “Well, I still don’t think a Demogrant is the right way to do it. Especially here where we have build our social services around NIT. It did not disincentivize work and did not spend money where not needed. It reduced the administrative complexity that was in the old welfare system.”

“I don’t know how you can say it reduced your administrative costs. It created a huge headache, instability, for people on fluctuating incomes. I guess that was alright when there were fewer of them, but as more people got shaken out of stable employment...,

We had to file new income statements every month and usually needed the help of social workers, which tightened control of social workers over their lives.

I’m not saying most social workers did not try to do their work ethically.

Let me explain it in a more theoretical way. You drew the surplus of the economy out of the workers, the producers, before they had even got their hands on it, and whether they could afford it or not. You made them carry the entire burden of maintaining civilization.

We draw the surplus from where it accumulates, after it has actually been produced. That way we draw only the surplus energy of the system, to put it back into renewing the system. So, as the working people are not kept squeezed to the limit, there is a reserve capacity in the economy. We saw in the crisis of the last year how important that is.”

Growled Gomper; “But if you created enough good, high wage jobs there would be enough money and there would be few precariously employed people.”

Averred Angie; “You talk as though these ‘good high wage jobs’ can be produced on an assembly line somewhere. A job is not a commodity or a property, it is a relationship. The job and the wage must be economically justified.

The ‘good, high wage jobs’ happened two generations ago before the disruption, when Centralia dominated the Nearthian economy and there was room for expansion. A main cause of the disruption was that we ran into the natural limits of further expansion. The

industrial capitalists, and the labor bureaucracy which was and is in a 'love/hate relation' with them, flatly refused to believe it.

Trying to base an economy on wages and income taxes was never a viable way of running things in the long run."

Stryker; "We still need some kind of income tax system to be able to collect the data we need to plan services for low income people. It even provided useful information about wealthier people, which helped combat tax avoidance."

"Me and my associates working out of Pareto can tell you that your tax data is in fact mostly useless. It does not tell us what people's actual needs were and are.

The system we will put in place will track what people are buying with their income, without identifying them personally. Much more useful information for economic planning, for running services. It's done with the throughput taxes.

As for the affluent, the wealth tax we developed works effectively like an

income tax, but just for them. We have very effective methods of tracking where the money came from to acquire assets, and where there are holes, contradictions, in people's accounts. We create a moving image of their personal wealth, which can go back in time. This severely limits opportunity for tax avoidance."

Zoomie poked her head in; "Let's get this done, out here."

Angie stood up. "There'll still be good jobs for social workers once we've fixed everything. Your unions may have to restructure. You'll need retraining. Probably work out of schools, health clinics and so on, dealing with real problems, instead of solving personal budget problems at the housing offices.

There is a future. It's coming soon."

She walked out. The light fixture winked, blinked, then nodded off. Gomper and Stryker were left to contemplate the deep gloom.

Said Gomper; "Well, it worked beautifully for a long time..."

*The moral of this story is; Fantasy is limitless,
reality has limited options.*