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CORY DOCTOROW'S




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Collection edited by Justin Eisinger
Collection designed by Neil Uyetake

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# What Came First <br> By Cory Doctorow 

I literally can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't a comics reader. There were comics and science fiction novels around the house from the time I could reach the shelves, and I started looking at the pictures even before I could read the words.

Nevertheless, I became a prose writer, not a comics writer. For starters, you could read a book and figure out how it was written: the writer sat down and hammered out a stream of words, they were typeset and the book was published. But how did you write a comic? Did the writer describe each panel? Just write the dialog? I remember talking it over with friends at summer camp and there was one kid who was dead certain that the artist drew all the pictures first and then the writer figured out what the story would be, writing the dialog that made it all make sense!
Then there was the matter of authorship. I knew who Stan Lee was, of coursethat guy with The Voice who did the voice-overs on the Hulk cartoons. But who actually *wrote* these comics? I was pretty sure that Stan Lee-and whomever it was with the initials of "D.C."-weren't penning all the funny books on the spinner rack at the convenience store. MAD Magazine had by-lines: Al Jaffee, Dave Berg. But it seemed like the comics' authors' names were tiny, downplayedunimportant. If I was going to grow up to be a writer, I wanted to be an important writer-not just a farmhand on Uncle Stan's Ranch.
So now I'm a writer (importance: debatable). The books I write have my name in big letters on the spine and cover. For better or for worse, they're the products of my imagination and what happens in them is pretty much down to what I imagine.
Not long ago, the folks at IDW sent me an email and asked me if I'd be game for licensing some of my stories to be adapted for comics. I was a little skeptical: I don't know anything about writing comics (though I was pretty sure by this point that the words come before the pictures)-and what's more, I do this whacky thing with my books and stories where I make them available as free, re-mixable downloads on the day they're published, and I just didn't have the energy to argue about this with some comics people.
My agent got in touch with IDW, talked to them for a while and came back to me: "No problem," he said. "They'll get kick-ass writers and illustrators to do the adaptations, and they'll let us do the whole series under a Creative Commons license once it's collected into a single volume." Awesome. "Plus, I got you approval over the scripts and art as part of the deal." Huh? What do I know about art and scripts for comics? Well, it can't hurt.

## \#\#\#\#

What followed was an education in the whole production cycle for comics, from treatment to script to rough art to final art to lettering and inking to covers. And I got to be a part of it. I mostly sat back and tried not to screw things up-though as the author of the underlying stories, I was sometimes (infrequently) moved to intervene and redirect the abridgment process.
Mostly, I just sat back in awe as a crew of incredibly talented writers and artists paid me the immense compliment of focusing their creative energy on the work that I'd done. I got to watch as these people interpreted my ideas, got to more-orless peer into the heads of readers and discover, in detail, what happened between the words I wrote and the words they read. It's a spookily cool process. I heartily recommend it to you-in fact, I'm trying to figure out a compact, quick way of doing this with my writing students in the future. It taught me a lot about writing.
And now here we are, with this extraordinary volume in hand (or on your screenhi there, downloaders!!). I can call it extraordinary without too much ego because this is, in a very meaningful sense, not my book: it's a book that was written, drawn and lettered by Dara Naraghi, Esteve Polls, Sam Keith, Robert Studio, J.C. Vaughn, Daniel Warner, Scott Morse, Paul McCaffrey, Paul Pope, Dan Taylor, Dustin Evans, Ben Templesmith, Erich Owens, Ashley Wood, James Anthony Kuhoric, Guiu Vilanova, German Torres, Danny Parsons, Robbie Robbins, Neil Uyetake, Chris Mowry, and Amauri Osorio. It's got my name on the cover-I guess I'm the schmucky Stan Lee figure on this spin of the karma wheel-but they did it.

And now I want to write comics. I've seen how it's done. I think I can do it. I guess we'll all find out, soon enough.

Cory Doctorow<br>March 2008















Pdo you know who these people are that you're killing*
$3 n 0$

3they're working Tor less thar a dollar a cay. the shirts they make are traded tor 901d and the gold is sold on ebay they're TDStly young qirls
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tanilies, they're the lucky ones: the unlucky Ones uork as orostitutes
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toes, but the gare has counterneasures against then. hiring ehilgren te click the nouse 1 s cheaper than hlring peogrammers to
circunvert the rules.
>I've been trying to uniondze then because they've goc a very high rate of injury. they have to play for lB-hour shifts with only one short toilet break.


## 3not a clue

| PI I've been trying to
| >

Pah. I see. I an the Pani ly seer renainian.
|>go aheag. I, uill see you aqain, I'n sure.












## DOCTOROW ON: "ANDA'S GAME"

Editor Tom Waltz: Cory, let's start with the obvious question-what sparked the idea for "Anda's Game"?

Cory Doctorow: Two things; one was my idea of writing a bunch of stories that riffed on the titles of famous SFI, Robot, Anda's Game (Ender's Game), I, Row-Boat and soon, True Names-after hearing Ray Bradbury disparage this practice, calling it rude and immoral. Bradbury was pissed off at Michael Moore for calling his movie Fahrenheit 9/11. Bradbury supports Bush's plan to go to Mars-but I thought that this was just goofy. Titles are-and have always been-fair game. What's more, Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury's classic novel, is all about free expression (Bradbury denies this-he says it's about television, which is why you should never ask writers what their work is about). (Should we end the interview now?)
The other thing was the early reports of gold farming in games, something that really sparked my imagination.

TW: I consider myself a semi-avid video gamer, and when I first read "Anda's Game," I thought it was a bizarre vision of a possible future, only to read an article recently about how China is taking over in the gaming "sweat shop" market from other developing nations like Mexico. For me, personally, it's a sad and pathetic reality that videogames have become so important to some people that they are willing to go to great lengths to cheat at the games, even so far as purchasing in-game characters that were earned through what truly amounts to industrial slavery. Do you feel that gaming has become too important, and, if so, is the technology to blame... or the gamers themselves?

CD: No, gaming hasn't become too important! MMORPGS and other MMOs are social constructs, agoras where we meet, socialize, make friends, cooperate, and play together. It's where we undertake the business of civilization. It's a goddamned shame that (so far) all of these civilizations-in-bottles are owned by giant media companies (worse still, that Universal/Blizzard, a really abusive bully, owns World of Warcraft, the most
popular), but asking if play has become too important is as silly as asking if art has become too important, or thought, or scholarship.

TW: When I sent you the artwork for "Anda's Game," penciled by the fantastic Esteve Polls, your reaction to seeing it for the first time was... and I quote... "Holy crap, this is EERILY COOL!" I was hoping you could expand on that and describe the different feelings you are having as you see your short prose stories coming to life in illustrated sequential form.

CD: Well, I'd never really had my work adapted before. When a talented artist like Polls turns my work into something that isn't what I saw in my mind's eye, but IS a plausible thing for a reader to see, it's like being able to stick a reader in an MRI while she reads one of my stories and see what it's doing to her head.

TW: Taking the last question a step further, we have various comic book writers adapting your short stories in script form for this project-specifically for "Anda's Game," writer Dara Naraghi. What things do you look for in a script based on your work before you approve it for publication?

CD: Well, it has to suit the work-it doesn't have to be accurate (in the sense of portraying all the events that took place in the work), but it DOES have to be faithful to the artistic intent and mood that inspired the work.

TW: Have you ever considered scripting your own comic book series or graphic novel?

CD: Every now and again. I have a million projects on my plate right now-BoingBoing and umpty boinglets, little blog projects that we're playing with; a movie I'm coproducing; a TV show I'm consulting on; two nonfiction books; a zillion short story ideas; my podcast; travel; speaking (and I'm moving home to London from LA in two weeks!).

## WHEN SYSADMINS RULED THE EARTH






THIS IS
EIG, BOSS.
EPIC.










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STREETS. WHEA DO




DAY 2, 11:19 PM.








## DOCTOROW ON: "WHEN SYSADMINS RULED THE EARTH"

Editor Tom Waltz: Cory, you've stated that one of the best jobs you've ever had was working as a freelance systems administrator. What was it about that job that was so appealing to you?

Cory Doctorow: There's something really wonderful about working under the hood, making all the systems go. When you're actually *using* a computer, it's easy to let it get all crusty, the wires tangled, the data hygiene less than perfect. But when you're the *administrator* for that computer, you can look at it objectively and keep it in good running order-it's a little like inviting a friend over to clean out your closets: they don't have the same emotional attachment to your ratty old t-shirts, so they're capable of seeing that they need to be cut up for rags.

TW: In "When Sysadmins Ruled the Earth," global destruction takes place on a catastrophic scale. Though you allude (vaguely) to a variety of causes for your fictional disaster, you never really say what the root cause is. Did you have a specific cause in mind when you wrote the short prose story, and have your ideas about what might initiate such destruction changed since?

CD: Naw-one of the things I wanted to make clear in the book is that most of us will never know what caused "the end of the world," should it come. As we make various preparations to destroy the earth-stockpiling nukes, building missile-defense shields, weaponizing plague bombs, etc-we focus on the ideological reasons for doing so: "We must save the world from [Communism| Islam|Capitalism|Secularism]." But if anyone ever actually pulls it off, the number of corpses who'll understand the ideological roots of Armageddon will be approximately zero. And the survivors will be more interested in digging through the rubble looking for canned goods than in reading your manifesto.

TW: In the story, the character Felix recites from the "Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace." Is the Declaration a real thing? If so, how did you feel when you first read it?

CD: Indeed it is-it's the work of my friend and hero John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Grateful Dead lyricist. http://www.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html. I read this on a train from Montreal to Toronto in the pages of the Whole Earth Review, and I shivered the whole way home. I knew that I was on the cusp of something wonderful.

TW: We all know that the Internet can be a tool of warfare (i.e., terrorist recruiting), and that tends to be the kind of thing the news media likes to talk about most, and you even have one of the characters in the story (Will) suggest that the Internet be shut down in order to save the world from further damage. Does any part of you agree with Will, or do you think the benefits of the 'Net far outweigh the obvious dangers?

CD: I'm a firm believer in the idea that we shouldn't punish the innocent to get at the guilty. The answer to bad speech is more speech. Or, as a certain wigged scribe once wrote, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

TW: Okay, in my time, l've worked as an Electronic Interchange Analyst specializing in Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), so I know a little bit about sysadmins. You've called sysadmins "the unsung heroes of the century"-is that because the only time sysadmins ever get mentioned (in my experience, at least) is when they are getting blamed for the network being down?

CD: There's a lot of truth to that—but it's not just that they get all the blame, it's that they get none of the credit. Solving complex IT problems requires the magical intuition of a shaman and the technical skill of a master clock builder. Every second of every day, sysadmins are











AND THEN 1 EXPLAINED TO HM ALL
ABOUT HOW YOU NEVER BID AGAINST
ABCUT HOW YOU NEVER BID AGAINST
HOW YOU GET TO KNOW THE
OTHER FELLONS' TASTES, AND
WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING
T-EY MIGHT L LE, YO HALL I
DO THE SAME FOR YOU.












IT WAS A SET OF FOUR WATCHED LITILE
CRPHAN ANNIE OVALTNE GLASSES.
ORPHAN ANNIE OVALTINE GLASSES.


SEEING THEN TOOK ME RIGHT SEERG THEM TOOK ME RGHT






## DOCTOROW ON: "CRAPHOUND"

Editor Tom Waltz: Okay, Cory, I gotta ask this first: are you a craphound?

Cory Doctorow: In soul, but not in body. Several intercontinental moves over the past five years, and tens of thousands of dollars spent on storage lockers, have all but cured me of the acquiring stuff bug. But my instinct is to amass huge piles of crapola of various descriptions in great, towering burial mounds.

TW: When I was reading this story, thematically I was struck by two ideas. First, I couldn't get the saying out of my head that goes, "One man's garbage is another man's treasure." And, second, I couldn't stop thinking about how much the concept of these characters working so hard to seek out hidden "treasures" and, sometimes, competing against each other for said treasures, is very much like the online shopping culture that has developed over the last few years (as with eBay, etc.). Are these concepts close to what you were hoping to convey with "Craphound"?

CD: Well, sure! I wrote this story just as eBay was starting, in the heyday of yard-saling in Toronto. There was a weekly estate auction, many annual rummage sales, and so on, and I was living in a giant warehouse with 20 ' ceilings that was literally stacked to the rafters with junk. I knew a million other junk collectors, pickers, etc., and we all had a culture of competition and appreciation.

TW: Throughout the story, you use cowboy and Indian antiques as the alien character's main shopping interest. Is there any particular reason you chose these items as something a creature from another world would so actively seek to own?

CD: This is one of those questions that supposes that writers know why they choose what they choosemostly, it's intuition at the time. In hindsight, l'd say that cowboys and Indians have the virtue of being alien to someone born in 1971 (like me), who wasn't alive during
their heyday, but familiar, too, in that I grew up reading stories and seeing movies and cartoons in which kids played with them. So they're like second-hand nostalgia, my nostalgia for the toys of a different generation.

TW: What special item would you like to find in a forgotten corner of a rummage sale someday?

CD: I have a great collection of Rosebuds and ones that got away. Foremost are the "changing portrait" Haunted Mansion souvenir cards I bought at the Haunted Mansion gift shop on my first trip to Disney World in 1977, when I was six. They were cardboard cards with portraits of slightly sinister looking people on them, over-painted with transparent, glow-in-the-dark pictures. When you exposed them to light, then looked at them in darkness, they glowed with "secret" faces revealing the pictures to be, in truth, of monsters: vampires, werewolves, etc.
I fell asleep in the rental car, clutching these. The car broke down on the way back to my grandparents' place in Ft. Lauderdale, and the rental agency sent out another car. My parents transferred me, sleeping, to the other car, and didn't bring along the portraits. When I woke in the morning and discovered them gone, I was heartbroken. We called the agency, but they couldn't find them. Gone.
I never found another set, not for love or money. The next time I went to Disney World, they were no longer selling them. I'm sure the luminescent paint had toxic levels of radium or something. In my imagination, they loom, perfect and magnificent, the best toys ever.
Also, once in the Portobello Road market, I found a stall with three or four reproduction Victorian pornographic watches; the watches featured a regular, chunk, oldfashioned dial on the front, but when you turned them over, the case sported a transparent window showing the mechanical works within. The works had been shaped in the form of men and women in sexual poses, cunningly arranged such that each tick of the clock was a thrust. They weren't very expensive, but the friend I was with convinced me not to buy them. I changed my mind and went back the next week and couldn't find them againand I never have.


NOMBV AND THE D-GOPPERSS


BUT GODDAWWIT, WHO WOULDN'T WANT A FULLY
AUTOMATIC, LASER-GUIDED, ARMOR-PIERCING,
SELF-REPLENISHING PERSONAL SIDEARM?









[85]















## DOCTOROW ON: "NIMBY

Editor Tom Waltz: In "Nimby and the D-Hoppers," transdimensional warriors move in and out of (for lack of a better term) less-developed dimensions, bringing their technically advanced weaponry along with them, often with deadly results. Is it fair to draw comparisons between your story and something like the first exposure to settlers' guns by Native Americans, who were forced to adapt to the new technologies they faced if they were to even stand a chance on the battlefield?

Cory Doctorow: No, this is really different-those were "first contacts" between people with really different technologies (or, more importantly, really different immune systems).
The agrarians in "Nimby" are refuseniks, people who treat technology as cars, with brakes-not like a kayak (steerable, but no brakes or reverse gear!) (which is how most of us treat technology).

TW: In your story, the houses are actually living organisms. What gave you the idea to present them this way, and do you see a future when such an organic domicile can truly exist?

CD: No no! I don't write about the future, I write about the present!
Biotech is a great field for allegory in science fiction. 25 years ago, we were using computers as allegories for the future of technology, getting away with having them do all kinds of impossible computery things (think Wargames and Tron!). We got away with it because practically no one knew much about computers. No more.
Now we need a new frontier, some place where we can bury our crazy, story-driven, allegorical technological fudging. Biotech is it.

## AND THE D-HOPPERS"

TW: Going back to the theme in question number one, the character Barry ultimately agrees that Sally's idea to set up a civil defense force is a good one, provided the weapons they use for such purposes are of a reliable nature, and not the kind that blow off the shooter's own arms. Do you see Barry's reasoning as more conciliatory or pragmatic as it relates to the necessity of military arms as a defensive measure?

CD: Hum-I think you read a different story than I wrote. They don't decide it would be a good idea-they decide that being a refusenik is a pain in the ass, that technology is addictive, that the thing they thought of as a car turned out to be a kayak after all.

TW: One thought that ran through my mind when reading "Nimby" was that security is truly a question of what side of the gun you're on. It's certainly a running theme in the current real-world rhetoric between the United States and Iran in regards to Iran's alleged development of nuclear weapons. Do you feel this relates at all to the underlying theme of your story?

CD: Well, this is more about the fact that the two REAL sides in any fight are combatants and non-combatants, not white-hats and black-hats. The warring sides-DHS and terrorists, for example-have more in common with each other than they do with the rest of us, who think they're all full of shit.

TW: Tell the truth-what's the first thing you'd do if you got your hands on a fully automatic, laser-guided, armorpiercing, self-replenishing personal sidearm?

CD: Blog it.





THE SOCIAL HARMONY MAN WAS THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES, A KIND OF EAGLE-EYED SUPERCOP


R PEED ROBEERT HAD CHECKED IN FNE MOD TIMES, SHADOWING ADA AROUND THE MALL AND THEN HAD FALLEN SILENT.







THE PHONE-BOOKG. FAT BOOKS FILLED WITH ILLEGAL SOFTWARE CODE LEFT ANONYMOUSLY IN PAY PHONES, TOILETS AND OTHER SEMI-PRIVATE PLACES. SOCIAL HARMONY SAID THEY WERE WRITTEN BY NON-THREE-LAWS BRAINS IN EURASIA.

DON'T CARE IF YOU MADE IT ALL I CARE ABOUT IS WHERE MY DADGHTER WENT, AND WITH WHOM BeVMIXIX V/SUAL RECORD OF HER ON THE MALL CAMERAS, AND THE ROBOT I HAD TAILING
-SEE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC LITTLE INFRARED ORGANIC LEDG. THE ROBOTS AND CLOSED-CIRCUIT SySTENS ARE GUPER-GENGITIVE TO INFRARED SO THAT THEY CAN GET GOOD DETAIL $\underbrace{\text { IN DIM LIGHT. }}$

THE INFRARED
OLEDS ELND THEM SO ALL THEY GET IS B OOBG, AND HALF THE TIME EVEN THAT GETS ERROR-CORRECTED OUT SO YOU'RE BASICALLY /NV/SIBGE





EVERY SOLDIER YOU SENT UP AGAINST US WE COULD SELECTIVELY KILL OFFICERS, OR RIGHT-HANDED FIGHTERS, OR SOLDIERS WHOSE NAMES STARTED WITH THE LETTER 'G.' UNATS SOLDIERS FIGHT WITH THEIR HANDS TIED BEHIND THEIR BACKS BY THE THREE LAWS.


促 IN THE SERVICE OF A HALF-BAKED SUPERSTITION AEOUT THE MORAL QUALITIES OF YOUR THREE LAWS AND YOU CALL MY HOME CORRUPT?

#  



YOU LIVE IN A FAKED STATE, ARTURO. IN EVERY FIELD, YOU LAG ELRASIA AND CAFTA: MEDICINE, ART, LITERATURE, PHYSICS...

> … EVERYONE AT UNATS ROBOTICS R-ANDD KNOWS THIS. THE EURASLAN ROBOTS ARE ENGINEERED TO ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE CAPTURED A CERTAI PERCENTAGE OF THE TME, JUST SO THAT

"I'D BEEN CALLED IN TO WORK ON A CADTURED EURASIAN POSITRONIC BRAIN, TO FIND ITS VILNERABILITIES THE MAN FROM SOCIAL HARMONY TOLD ME WHAT WOULD HAPDEN TO ME-TO YOU, TO OUR DALGHTER-IF I DIDN'T COOPERATE. THEY WANTED ME TO BE A PART OF A SECRET UNIT WHO BUILD NON-THREE-LAWS POSITRONICS FOR INTERNAL USE BY THE STATE, ANTI-PERSONNEL ROBOTS USED TO PUT DOWN UPRISINGS AND
TORTURE-ROBOTS FOR USE IN
QUESTIONING DISSIDENTS.



## cairviey cinema







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## DOCTOROW ON: "It ROBOT"

Editor Tom Waltz: Okay, Cory, the first question is probably the most obvious-how does your title "I, Robot" tie into the same title used by Isaac Asimov?

Cory Doctorow: Well, I wanted to revisit some of Asimov's assumptions. I've said this a lot: sf writers write about the present, even when they try to write about the future. Asimov was a New Dealer, someone who was profoundly moved by FDR's rationalist plan to put the country back on its feet by planning, regulating and shaping the way that technology and social structures operated.
So it was that Asimov imagined a world in which only one kind of computer could be built (a positronic brain) and that it would be controlled by one company, pretty much forever.
This is not far off from current regulatory proposals from the MAFIAA (the MPAA and RIAA, et al)-the idea that all technologies will be designed by their little Politburo and forced to adhere to standards intended to limit copying.
It's Orwellian-and so I decided to update the story by mashing up Asimov and 1984 and this is what I got.

TW: In your story, Natalie the "rogue" scientist tells Arturo the cop that he lives in a country where "inconvenient science is criminalized, where whole avenues of experimentation and research are shut down in the service of a half-baked superstition..." Does this relate to real world science vs. morality issues such as the stem cell research debate that is currently raging in the United States?

CD: Oh yes! But I was really thinking of the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) that makes it a crime to tell people about the flaws in anti-copying software, like the stuff that stops you from watching foreign DVDs on your home player, or from listening to songs from the iTunes store on a non-Apple player.
Since 1998, telling people about the mathematical flaws in the cryptosystems used by these systems has been illegal. In 2001, the FBI jailed a foreign researcher, Dmitry Syklarov, who'd just given a presentation
describing how badly implemented Adobe's anti-copying technology for ebooks was. Dmitry said, basically, that the emperor had no clothes-so we put him in jail.
The fact is, it's never going to get any harder to copy data. Anyone who claims otherwise is either trying to sell you something or has not been paying attention for the past 20 years.
Making laws that prohibit telling people how easy it is to copy things doesn't make copying harder-it just makes criminals of us all.

TW: If you had the supreme power to create your own allencompassing Three Laws, would you do it? If so, what would Doctorow's Three Laws be?

CD:

1. Don't punish the innocent to get at the guilty.
2. Never declare war on an abstract noun like "terrorism."
3. Free speech is more important than business models.

TW: Do you believe Western Civilization (and by this, I'm referring to North America, the UK and Western Europe) is falling behind Central Europe and the Eastern World in the fields of medicine, art, literature and physics in the same way you describe UNATS trailing Eurasia in your story? If so, do you feel there is a primary cause for the gap between the two?

CD: I don't think so-not right now. Central Europe and China are plagued by corruption and repression, which are antithetical to science. However, I think that the Brazilians are kicking serious ass, as are the Indians.
The gap arises because these countries don't have the same incumbent industries-pharmaceutical companies, entertainment giants-who are demanding legal protection from technological progress.

## 

## 











[135]


MATA DIDN' COME HOME FROM THE FIGHTING FOR THREE WEEKS. I PRAYED SHE WASN'T DEAD.


WINTER SETTLED IN THAT WEEK AND THE COLO WAS OUR CONSTANT COMPANION. BREAD RATIONG WERE CLT AGAIN TO TZO GRANS AND THEY HAD HARD STONY PEBBLES IN IT. EVERYONE KNEW THEY WERE THERE TO INCREASE THE WEIGHT




LESS THAN A WEEK TO LIVE,
WHO WOULO TAKE CARE OF
TROVER WHLE MATA WAGS
GONE FIGHTNG THE WIRR?






[144]

THE SPY-EYES WERE ALL PLANTED. I RAN AS FAST AS I COLLD OLT OF THE TRENCHES AND THROUGH THE CITY. ALL I MAD TO DO WAS REACH THE WIZARD TO CONFIRN THAT HE WOULD TAKE CARE OF MATA AND TROVER WHEN I WAS GONE DEAD AND SHAMELNGG AMONG THE ZOMEIES.


BUT THE FEVER HAD COME BACK WORSE THAN EVER ANO NY ARMS AND LEGS ARMS AND LEGS
WOLLDN'T WORK RIGHT. THE ZOMBISM WAS KILLING ME FASTER THAN THE SOLDIER HAD SAID



PEOP-E WERE OYNG LIKE FLIES, AND THE ZOMEIES FED ON THEM AND UNLESS THE MEAT WAS DISPOSED OF, THE ZONBIES WOULD MLLLTIPLY LIKE RATS.



［14日］




## DOCTOROW ON: "AFTER THE SIEGE"

Editor Tom Waltz: Cory, you've said in past interviews that the story "After the Siege" holds an especially personal meaning to you. For those who don't know, could you please explain why that is?

Cory Doctorow: This story is based loosely on the Siege of Leningrad, one of the most brutal moments in WWIILeningrad, a city of millions, was laid siege to by Hitler's army for 900 days, and for most of that time, they were not re-provisioned. Residents were all inducted into civil defense tasks, grueling and grisly never-ending labor. By the second winter, they'd burned every stick of furniture and eaten every animal-including the rats. There was even cannibalism. Most of these extreme effects were Stalin's fault: he considered Hitler his ally, so when the shelling started, he refused to allow anyone in Leningrad to defend themselves-generals were ordered to stay in their summer homes and not come back to join the army. No one-not even children-was allowed to evacuate.
My grandmother, Valentina Rachman, was twelve when the siege began. She lived in Leningrad with her two-year-old brother (my great-uncle Bora, who is now one of the curators at the brilliant Popov Communications Museum, a kind of Soviet Silicon Valley Computer Museum) and her parents. It was two years before she was evacuated, and she hauled corpses, dug trenches, and starved. When she was fourteen, they evacuated her to Siberia, where she recuperated working on a horse farm, and then ended up in the Red Army, where she met my grandfather. She got pregnant, so they stole papers and fled to Azerbaijan, where my father was born.
Growing up, I never understood the Siege. My grandmother would tell us she'd experienced horrors in the war, and l'd kind of shrug, thinking of friends whose families had been through the concentration camps. I remember thinking, "You spent most of the war at home with your family... how bad could it have been?"
But in 2006, I visited St. Petersburg (the present name for Leningrad) with my parents, grandmother, brother and sister-in-law, saw my varied and sprawling family there and walked the streets. It was high summer-not quite the White Nights (the period in June when the sun never
sets and the locals stay out all night reveling), but still hot and sunny, with long bloody sunsets that started at 9 P.M. and lingered for an hour or more.
My grandmother walked us through the streets of her childhood and pointed to buildings, saying things like, "I was too weak to carry the body from that building so we threw him out the window and scraped him up afterwards." She told us about cannibalism and war, about noble deeds and foul ones, and I was never the same. A month later, I started this story while on a flight from London to Singapore. I wrote 6,000 words in the sky, and the rest over the next week or two on further long-haul flights. I'd settle into my seat and three thousand words would just happen. And l'd look out the window and we'd be over some ocean again.
I gave this story's initial publication rights to Esli, a Russian-language science fiction magazine. They translated it for me and I gave a copy to my grandmother.

TW: Politically speaking, Russia appears to be at an interesting crossroads these days with President Putin working to maintain control of the country even after his presidency expires. Do you see any correlation between the real world instability of that country with the events that take place in "After the Siege"?

CD: Well, sort of. Russia's a complete fucking disaster, of course, and Putin's a creepy, thuggish ex-KGB apparat whose machine is in large part responsible for turning Russia into a nation that is losing ten percent of its population every year due to early mortality.
But Russia isn't the best parallel to the mythical nation of "After the Siege;" a better parallel would be any of the many former Soviet republics-or even Iraq-where all the local infrastructure has been sold at fire-sale rates to foreign companies to pay off a debt that the former dictators owed to Western governments.
It's the slimiest of slimy tricks-a protection racket played against an entire nation. You get a crummy dictatorship whose local strongman borrows gigantic amounts from Western banks while starving and torturing his people. Then, after the people get rid of him (or

invaders topple him), his debts are passed on to the people he's been torturing and killing and oppressing (often with guns bought with Western loans).
These people are expected to pay the construction costs for the torture chambers they've been suffering in, and to do so, they have to sell off their waterworks, power, roads, medical system-you name it. These are then run like corrupt fast-food outlets, delivering least value for most money, so the cost of everything from bread to power goes through the roof, while a few Fortune 100s get even richer (think of Chile for a sterling example of this).
This is the kind of government that I pictured the Revolutionaries of Moma and Popa's generation toppling. Cowards and profiteers who'd rather make nice with the cruel artificial life forms we call corporations than give their own people bread and medicine.

TW: There is a sequence in "After the Siege" where the main character, Valentine, plants electronic spy eyes in the trenches along the front lines at the behest of the Wizard, who says he uses them to document the atrocities there, though later he is accused of using the devices to exploit the violence for profit and entertainment. Is it fair to assume you are comparing these fictional devices to real-life embedded reporters who were attached to military units during the Iraq invasion?

CD: Well, sure-naturally. The media's total abdication of its role in Iraq to serve as the fourth estate and report objectively and fairly on what actually happens and happened there was the disgrace of this young century. They say piracy will kill television-if it destroys these bastards and the cynical profiteers who turned the press into a gutless propaganda machine, then so much the better. Steal some TV, kids-you're protecting democracy!

TW: Many people in your story suffer from a disease you term as "Zombiism." Is this comparable to, say, the horrendously extreme amount of AIDS cases in Africa, a continent also rife with warfare?

CD: Yeah, and all the other diseases-like malaria, which kills one person every second-that our pharma companies can't even be bothered to do research on because boner-pills are so much more profitable.
We grant global monopolies to these companies over the reproduction of chemical compounds. They argue that they need these patents because otherwise, no one would do the core research they do and we'd all be dead of disease without them.
But what do they spend their regulatory windfall on? Figuring out how to reformulate heartburn pills that are going public domain so that they can be re-patented, cheating the system and the world out of twenty more years of low-cost access to their magic potions; marketing budgets that beggar the imagination; lobbyists arguing for stricter rules.
Meanwhile, people are actually dying, in great numbers, of diseases treatable by drugs that Roche and Pfizer and the rest of the dope-mafia won't sell them at an accessible price, and won't let them make themselves.

TW: Well, this is the last issue in this first volume of IDW's Cory Doctorow's Futuristic Tales of the Here and Now. How do you feel about this adventure in the world of comic books?

CD: This has been a brilliant ride! I've always been a funnybook reader, but I never dreamt l'd be involved in their creation. Now that I've done so, I'm keen to do some more. I just wrote my first script, a little eight-page story for Slave Labor's final issue of The Haunted Mansion comic, and it was a blast. Now l'm thinking about other ways I can get involved in the industry.


