

I grimaced in disgust as I walked down the wide, spotless boulevard and imagined the fat cats of Section IV, leering at me through the windows. Albachten's cookies were making them corpulent and complacent, while the threat of starvation in Sections III and V loomed larger with each passing day. Even though Spiegel had apparently ended up with his life savings by means of some legal loophole I didn't fully understand, Josh Lerner could still somehow afford to live here, in Section IV heights, far from the filth overflowing from the gutters in the rest of Hitchcock. It made me sick, but now was no time to start hurling, except insofar as hurling meant hurling people in to walls. It was high time for that.

"Lerner!" I shouted up towards his windows.

"Who is it?" said Josh Lerner.

"Brubaker, the private eye. Open up."

There was a long silence.

"He isn't home. This is Bryce," said Josh Lerner, entirely unconvincingly.

"Listen, bub," I said. "This kinda thing might work over the telephone. But I'm on the Street Where You Live. You could play nice and let me in, or I could sit down right in front of your door and pass the time with a cigarette. And I got a lot of cigarettes."

He got the hint and opened the door. I put out my cigarette.

"Alright, bub," I said, stepping inside. "Start talking. I came here to do two things: get information and smoke cigarettes. And I'm all out of cigarettes."

"But that's not fair! You said—"

"Life ain't fair. When ya try to cut a pie into equal slices, ya end up making the whole pie smaller. It's a property of pie crusts, see. We got Trouble, Lerner. Right here in Hitchcock city. With a capital T and that rhymes with B and that stands for Bolton."

"I had nothing to do with that," said Lerner quickly. "What are you talking about?"

"What are *YOU* talking about?"

"You didn't hear? Vanished. Nobody's seen him since Tuesday, when he spoke before a crowd of thousands to propose a three-state solution to Hitchcock's problems."

"A three-state solution?"

"Cede Section I to Snell and Section V to Anatomy. It's not a bad plan, really. Everybody knows that first-years and upperclassmen can't coexist peaceful. And upperclassmen can't govern themselves. Just look at the Jorgonaut and Pranco."

I grabbed Lerner and tried rather ineffectually to hurl him against a wall. I think I must have sprained my wrist in the process.

“I’m not here to debate politics,” I said, nursing my wrist. “You’re going to tell me where Bolton is hiding. Steven LaRue is dead, and I want answers.”

“That’s what I’m saying,” Lerner insisted. “I can’t tell you where Bolton is. He’s missing, presumed dead, which is why I’m hiding. They’re after me next, I just know it!”

Hmm. There seemed to be an awful lot of people they were after next. But I still didn’t know who *they* were. Lerner was telling the truth. He knew nothing. It was past time to be gone.

“Sorry about trying to throw you into a wall,” I said. “Can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, which, in this case, represent the ligaments in my wrist. On the other hand, the eggs also represent eggs.”

I went into his kitchen and made myself an omelet. Then I left, and wandered back through the deserted streets towards Section I. So Bolton was missing. That certainly complicated things. Maybe Spiegel was right, and Bolton had killed LaRue and then fled the country. Or maybe Spiegel had orchestrated it all as part of a diabolical scheme to get rid of his rival Lerner. Maybe it would turn out that I had multiple personality disorder, and I was really behind it all. Or maybe some hardcore isolationist was trying to make sure Hitchcock would never have another HARC representative. There were so many possibilities. *With a little bit of luck I won’t get stuck*, I told myself. But it looked like I was stuck.

“It sucks to be you!” echoed the booming voice of the Jorgonaut from the grounds of his palace complex. “It sucks to be starving, disenfranchised, and not have a clue! It sucks to be you!”

Ah yes. It was “Exult the Glory the Supreme Leader through Song and Dance Week.” The infamous assassin Aaron Horton, called “Whacky Guy,” because he had no compunctions about whacking people, had accepted the Jorgonaut’s offer to become chief of police, and it looked like he was in charge of security. It was depressing to see him sink so low, but, then again, what do you do with a B.A. in English?

The cacophonous mixture of sounds was giving me a headache, so I ducked into the closest doorway, which happened to be one of the ubiquitous Bartlett eateries, which were owned and operated by the state. I needed a bite to eat anyway, and my definition of “eat” had always been generous. A sudden and inexplicable instinct drove me away from the shepherd’s pie I had been eyeing, and I wandered over to the Euro-French *Haute Cuisine* Provencal Station de Cordon Bleu, where they were serving fried chicken, and decided I’d stick with that.

I sat down at an empty table, and took a bite, then immediately spit it out again. *What on earth?* I thought. *It’s fried chicken. Even Bartlett can’t mess it up this bad.* But when I looked down at my plate, I found to my surprise that the morsel I just ejected wasn’t chicken at all. It was John Bolton’s mustache.

DUN DUN DUN...

(The dramatic sound effect, not, y'know, the color)

IN CASE YOU DON'T CARE:

- Tom Wood has nothing to say.
- House Homecoming will happen, according to Aaron.
- Bad Movie Night at 10PM Sunday. The movie is Surf Nazis Must Die.
- Snell House Trip to some musical or other by the creators of Urinetown. Talk to Stacy Hackner if you're interested.
- If, on the other hand, you're interested in Wilco, you should talk to Kai Eldredge. You're not allowed to be interested in both.
- Alan from Snell wants to invest in pool supplies. The billiards kind of pool, not the swimming kind of pool. Alan hates swimming. Also, Alan, not Allen. Allen hates both kinds of pool.
- Speaking of which, Adam Janofsky broke one of the pool cues in half. Adam obeys Newton's Third Law, and has therefore consented to being broken in half by a pool cue.
- Somehow, we continue to win at Sports.
- Max Falkowitz will be showing Battlestar Galactica in his room after House Meetings.
- Talia talked to the head chef of Bartlett, and can swear that he's a decent human being. If you want to talk to such a human being, you could talk to him to. Specifically, about allergies and stuff.
- Jory has supplies from KENYA! You could buy it and support women and children in KENYA! And once you're wearing a bunch of stuff from KENYA people will think you're from KENYA and you'll be able to run as fast as KENYANS!