

I rounded another corner, panting for breath, and almost ran right into a sign blocking the path: “Hallway Closed for Recarpeting until 2040,” it read, and then went on to explain that the current carpet situation wasn’t pedestrian-friendly, and had therefore warranted a three billion-dollar investment.

Shit, I said to myself. *Which way now?* I spun around, just in time to acquaint myself with the pickaxe that was destined to bury itself in my foot approximately two seconds into the future.

“We’re tearing up the existing carpet to try to make it look even older, thus justifying the decision we’ve already made to replace it with the new carpet,” said the man with the pickaxe in response to my howls of pain. “When we finish laying down the new carpet, we’ll probably tear that one up too. I mean, we’ve already invested in the pickaxes.”

“What are you talking about? I have an inch-wide puncture wound through the top of my foot!”

“Hmmm...” said the man with the pickaxe. “That’ll probably make you look older, thus justifying the decision to replace you that I’m sure somebody somewhere has already made. Not my responsibility. If you have a complaint, you can take it up with the Customer Satisfaction Bureau on the seventieth floor.”

I hobbled past him, back the way I had come, and turned left at the first opportunity. Over the millennia, the interior of the Reynolds Club had been warped until it resembled a gross physical reflection of the Escherian tangle of committees, bureaus, and special interest groups that comprised ORCSA. Rumor had it that even stepping on the wrong tile could leave the hapless explorer stranded inside for more than four years. But I gritted my teeth, and limped onwards. The seventieth floor, if it even existed, was far away, and there was little time. I had to find Mandy Stafford before it was too late.

I passed the room where the Bartlett Committee meeting wasn’t happening, because the Committee’s constitution included a clause specifying that a meeting could only be held if it had been so decided by majority vote at the previous meeting. I passed a room in which Resident Masters, Resident Heads, and Resident Assistants were amending their laws to allow for the existence of one Resident President and sixteen Resident Superfluities. Tom Wood, dressed to the nines, shot me a look that said “If you don’t tell the world how sharp I look, I’ll have you defenestrated,” only in a thick Australian accent. I even passed a room filled entirely with barrels of salted pork, which must have cost ORCSA thousands. Then, just when all seemed lost, I heard an anguished cry from the end of the hall:

“No! You’ll all be guilty! Killing me won’t bring back your goddamn job prospects!”

I raced forward and flung open the door to reveal Mandy Stafford locked inside a very phallic wicker contraption, surrounded by heaps and heaps of papers. Her preppily clad captors were all around, hauling papers towards the cage. It looked like they were planning to drown her in memos.

“IHC! Attack!” shouted their leader, whose face was hidden behind a sinister-looking crow mask.

[There follows a fight scene so contrived and poorly executed that we have omitted the details lest readers with any taste whatsoever suffer an aneurysm. Suffice it to say that the protagonist ends up dressed as a bear, punching a seemingly endless series of political science and economics majors in the face. A giant python also figures into it somehow. We will try to ensure that Brubaker’s literary talents never reach such an atrocious nadir again –ed.]

The leader was still alive, it seemed, and drawing in short, sputtering breaths, but the python’s fangs had done serious damage. He wouldn’t survive much longer. I lifted his mask hesitantly, and long blonde locks tumbled forward onto his brow. I gasped. My adversary was none other than Jordan Phillips.

“It was you all along!” I said, trying to process everything that had just happened. “LaRue, Bolton, and now this. Why?”

“I was just trying...to streamline...uchhh...the political process,” he managed. “HARC has long been...urghh...inefficient...”

“But at what cost, Jordan, at what cost?”

It was too late. He was gone.

“Phillips was just a wrench in the works,” came a voice from behind me. “I mean, a cog in the machine. The “wrench in the works” metaphor actually applies better to you or me.”

I spun around. Bartley was standing behind me, surveying the scene grimly.

“What I mean is, he didn’t plan all this himself. The Jorgonaut’s mixed up in it somehow, I just know it.”

“Bartley? What are you doing here? How did you even find me?”

“I came to deliver news of the outside world. You’ve been in Reynolds Club for a long time. While you’ve been gone, war broke out between Hitchcock and Snell!”

“War!?!” I replied, and silently congratulated myself on having vocally conveyed such nuanced punctuation. But there were more important things at stake.

“As you’ve probably heard, birthrates have been on the rise ever since Erica Fagin fled the country with all our condoms,” Bartley went on. “Then the residents of Section 4 witnessed something truly miraculous: Jacob Berman and a purple Mohawk both burst fully formed one evening from the forehead of Graham Albachten. The residents of Section IV interpreted this as a sign that the gods were on their side, and that they should take a stand against the tyranny of Section I. Section I replied by stepping up the tyranny to a whole new level. Caught in the

crossfire, many residents of Sections II and III fled their homes, and one, Adheeb Ghazali, made it to Snell, where he was allowed to settle in return for the access codes to Hitchcock's west gate. Even now, the armies of the Alans are pouring through that same gate into Hitchcock, slaughtering all in their path. Divided as we are, we don't stand a chance!"

"Um, hello?" said Mandy Stafford. "I still exist, y'know, even though I haven't been mentioned for over a page."

"Plus, we have this whole situation on our hands," Bartley went on, and picked up a folded piece of paper from Phillips' body. On it were scrawled the phone numbers and addresses of Erica Fagin, Ashley Altman, Max Falkowitz, and the Jorgonaut. "If you think this case is closed, think again."

"Like I said, still here. Can one of you take me out of this goddamn wicker phallus?"

I took my leave of Bartley and Stafford, found my way out of Reynolds Club, somehow, and began the long trek to Hitchcock across the wilderness of the quads. It was time to track down Jordan Phillips' contacts and get to the bottom of this. The plot looked to be much deeper than I had ever suspected. I dreaded to think of what might happen next. Evidently, so did the guy writing this story, because at this point, a Snellian bomber that looked oddly like a plot device passed overhead and released its load, knocking me unconscious and abruptly terminating this installment. Closure? What's closure?

THE HAPPENED/HAPPENING/WILL HAPPEN SECTION

- House Homecoming is happening (for real this time), on Friday of 7th Week.
- You know what happens at the end of Homecoming? (Hint: it also happens at the end of the word "homecoming"). You should have worn/should wear/should be wearing a condom. Condoms are on the 4th floor of Section 5.
- Section 2 won the pumpkin contest, after Tom altered the results by means of a secret formula consisting of liverwort, regression analysis, and too much spare time.
- The motion to impeach Elizabeth Lee failed due to insufficient zeal on the part of the impeachers. Which is peachy for the impeachee.
- You oughta increase your personal frequency of ID Showing by an iota. I oughta stop making such god-awful puns.
- There was a great migration of peoples to different parts of the dorm. Read all about it in the actual minutes part of the minutes.
- If you're here over Thanksgiving, you can participate in the Thanksgiving Pot Luck, organized by Max Falkowitz. More on that later.