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Cory Doctorow
San Francisco
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A note about this book, February 12, 2004:

As you will see, when you read the text beneath this section, I released this book a little over a year ago under the terms of a Creative Commons license that allowed my readers to freely redistribute the text without needing any further permission from me. In this fashion, I enlisted my readers in the service of a grand experiment, to see how my book could find its way into cultural relevance and commercial success. The experiment worked out very satisfactorily.

When I originally licensed the book under the terms set out in the next section, I did so in the most conservative fashion possible, using CC's most restrictive license. I wanted to dip my toe in before taking a plunge. I wanted to see if the sky would fall: you see writers are routinely schooled by their peers that maximal copyright is the only thing that stands between us and penury, and so ingrained was this lesson in me that even though I had the intellectual intuition that a "some rights reserved" regime would serve me well, I still couldn't shake the atavistic fear that I was about to do something very foolish indeed.

It wasn't foolish. I've since released a short story collection (*A Place So Foreign and Eight More*) and a second novel (*Eastern Standard Tribe*) in this fashion, and my career is turning over like a goddamned locomotive engine. I am thrilled beyond words (an extraordinary circumstance for a writer!) at the way that this has all worked out.

And so now I'm going to take a little bit of a plunge. Today, in coincidence with my talk at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference (*Ebooks: Neither E, Nor Books*).

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Prologue

I lived long enough to see the cure for death; to see the rise of the Bitch-un Society, to learn ten languages; to compose three symphonies; to realize my boyhood dream of taking up residence in Disney World; to see the death of the workplace and of work.

I never thought I'd live to see the day when Keep A-Movin' Dan would decide to deadhead until the heat death of the Universe.

Dan was in his second or third blush of youth when I first met him, sometime late-XXI. He was a rangy cowpoke, apparent 25 or so, all rawhide squint-lines and sunburned neck, boots worn thin and infinitely comfortable. I was in the middle of my Chem thesis, my fourth Doctorate, and he was taking a break from Saving the World, chilling on campus in Toronto and core-dumping for some poor Anthro major. We hooked up at the Grad Students' Union—the GSU, or Gazoo for those who knew—on a busy Friday night, spring-ish. I was fighting a coral-slow battle for a stool at the scratched bar, inching my way closer every time the press of bodies shifted, and he had one of the few seats, surrounded by a litter of cigarette junk and empties, clearly encamped.

Some duration into my foray, he cocked his head at me and raised a sun-bleached eyebrow. "You get any closer, son, and we're going to have to get a pre-nup."

I was apparent forty or so, and I thought about bridling at being called son, but I looked into his eyes and decided that he had enough realtime that he could call me son anytime he wanted. I backed off a little and apologized.

He struck a cig and blew a pungent, strong plume over the bartender's head. "Don't worry about it. I'm probably a little over accustomed to personal space."

I couldn't remember the last time I'd heard anyone on-world talk about personal space. With the mortality rate at zero and the birth-rate at non-zero, the world was inexorably accreting a dense carpet of people, even with the migratory and deadhead drains on the population. "You've been jaunting?" I asked—his eyes were too sharp for him to have missed an instant's experience to deadheading.

He chuckled. "No sir, not me. I'm into the kind of macho shitheadery that you only come across on-world. Jaunting's for play; I need work." The bar-glass tinkled a counterpoint.

I took a moment to conjure a HUD with his Whuffie score on it. I had to resize the window—he had too many zeroes to fit on my standard

display. I tried to act cool, but he caught the upwards flick of my eyes and then their involuntary widening. He tried a little aw-shucksery, gave it up and let a prideful grin show.

“I try not to pay it much mind. Some people, they get overly grateful.” He must’ve seen my eyes flick up again, to pull his Whuffie history. “Wait, don’t go doing that—I’ll tell you about it, you really got to know.

“Damn, you know, it’s so easy to get used to life without hyperlinks. You’d think you’d really miss ‘em, but you don’t.”

And it clicked for me. He was a missionary—one of those fringe-dwellers who act as emissary from the Bitchun Society to the benighted corners of the world where, for whatever reasons, they want to die, starve, and choke on petrochem waste. It’s amazing that these communities survive more than a generation; in the Bitchun Society proper, we usually outlive our detractors. The missionaries don’t have such a high success rate—you have to be awfully convincing to get through to a culture that’s already successfully resisted nearly a century’s worth of propaganda—but when you convert a whole village, you accrue all the Whuffie they have to give. More often, missionaries end up getting refreshed from a backup after they aren’t heard from for a decade or so. I’d never met one in the flesh before.

“How many successful missions have you had?” I asked.

“Figured it out, huh? I’ve just come off my fifth in twenty years—counterrevolutionaries hidden out in the old Cheyenne Mountain NORAD site, still there a generation later.” He sandpapered his whiskers with his fingertips. “Their parents went to ground after their life’s savings vanished, and they had no use for tech any more advanced than a rifle. Plenty of those, though.”

He spun a fascinating yarn then, how he slowly gained the acceptance of the mountain-dwellers, and then their trust, and then betrayed it in subtle, beneficent ways: introducing Free Energy to their greenhouses, then a gengineered crop or two, then curing a couple deaths, slowly inching them toward the Bitchun Society, until they couldn’t remember why they hadn’t wanted to be a part of it from the start. Now they were mostly off-world, exploring toy frontiers with unlimited energy and unlimited supplies and deadheading through the dull times en route.

“I guess it’d be too much of a shock for them to stay on-world. They think of us as the enemy, you know—they had all kinds of plans drawn up for when we invaded them and took them away; hollow suicide teeth, booby-traps, fall-back-and-rendezvous points for the survivors. They just can’t get over hating us, even though we don’t even know they

exist. Off-world, they can pretend that they're still living rough and hard." He rubbed his chin again, his hard calluses grating over his whiskers. "But for me, the real rough life is right here, on-world. The little enclaves, each one is like an alternate history of humanity—what if we'd taken the Free Energy, but not deadheading? What if we'd taken deadheading, but only for the critically ill, not for people who didn't want to be bored on long bus-rides? Or no hyperlinks, no ad-hocracy, no Whuffie? Each one is different and wonderful."

I have a stupid habit of arguing for the sake of, and I found myself saying, "Wonderful? Oh sure, nothing finer than, oh, let's see, dying, starving, freezing, broiling, killing, cruelty and ignorance and pain and misery. I know I sure miss it."

Keep A-Movin' Dan snorted. "You think a junkie misses sobriety?"

I knocked on the bar. "Hello! There aren't any junkies anymore!"

He struck another cig. "But you know what a junkie is, right? Junkies don't miss sobriety, because they don't remember how sharp everything was, how the pain made the joy sweeter. We can't remember what it was like to work to earn our keep; to worry that there might not be enough, that we might get sick or get hit by a bus. We don't remember what it was like to take chances, and we sure as shit don't remember what it felt like to have them pay off."

He had a point. Here I was, only in my second or third adulthood, and already ready to toss it all in and do something, anything, else. He had a point—but I wasn't about to admit it. "So you say. I say, I take a chance when I strike up a conversation in a bar, when I fall in love ... And what about the deadheads? Two people I know, they just went deadhead for ten thousand years! Tell me that's not taking a chance!" Truth be told, almost everyone I'd known in my eighty-some years were deadheading or jaunting or just gone. Lonely days, then.

"Brother, that's committing half-assed suicide. The way we're going, they'll be lucky if someone doesn't just switch 'em off when it comes time to reanimate. In case you haven't noticed, it's getting a little crowded around here."

I made pish-tosh sounds and wiped off my forehead with a bar-napkin—the Gazoo was beastly hot on summer nights. "Uh-huh, just like the world was getting a little crowded a hundred years ago, before Free Energy. Like it was getting too greenhousey, too nukey, too hot or too cold. We fixed it then, we'll fix it again when the time comes. I'm gonna be here in ten thousand years, you damn betcha, but I think I'll do it the long way around."

He cocked his head again, and gave it some thought. If it had been any of the other grad students, I'd have assumed he was grepping for some bolstering factoids to support his next sally. But with him, I just knew he was thinking about it, the old-fashioned way.

"I think that if I'm still here in ten thousand years, I'm going to be crazy as hell. Ten thousand years, pal! Ten thousand years ago, the state-of-the-art was a goat. You really think you're going to be anything recognizably human in a hundred centuries? Me, I'm not interested in being a post-person. I'm going to wake up one day, and I'm going to say, 'Well, I guess I've seen about enough,' and that'll be my last day."

I had seen where he was going with this, and I had stopped paying attention while I readied my response. I probably should have paid more attention. "But why? Why not just deadhead for a few centuries, see if there's anything that takes your fancy, and if not, back to sleep for a few more? Why do anything so final?"

He embarrassed me by making a show of thinking it over again, making me feel like I was just a half-pissed glib poltroon. "I suppose it's because nothing else is. I've always known that someday, I was going to stop moving, stop seeking, stop kicking, and have done with it. There'll come a day when I don't have anything left to do, except stop."

On campus, they called him Keep-A-Movin' Dan, because of his cowboy vibe and because of his lifestyle, and he somehow grew to take over every conversation I had for the next six months. I pinged his Whuffie a few times, and noticed that it was climbing steadily upward as he accumulated more esteem from the people he met.

I'd pretty much pissed away most of my Whuffie—all the savings from the symphonies and the first three theses—drinking myself stupid at the Gazoo, hogging library terminals, pestering profs, until I'd expended all the respect anyone had ever afforded me. All except Dan, who, for some reason, stood me to regular beers and meals and movies.

I got to feeling like I was someone special—not everyone had a chum as exotic as Keep-A-Movin' Dan, the legendary missionary who visited the only places left that were closed to the Bitchun Society. I can't say for sure why he hung around with me. He mentioned once or twice that he'd liked my symphonies, and he'd read my Ergonomics thesis on applying theme-park crowd-control techniques in urban settings, and liked what I had to say there. But I think it came down to us having a good time needling each other.

I'd talk to him about the vast carpet of the future unrolling before us, of the certainty that we would encounter alien intelligences some day, of the unimaginable frontiers open to each of us. He'd tell me that dead-heading was a strong indicator that one's personal reservoir of introspection and creativity was dry; and that without struggle, there is no real victory.

This was a good fight, one we could have a thousand times without resolving. I'd get him to concede that Whuffie recaptured the true essence of money: in the old days, if you were broke but respected, you wouldn't starve; contrariwise, if you were rich and hated, no sum could buy you security and peace. By measuring the thing that money really represented—your personal capital with your friends and neighbors—you more accurately gauged your success.

And then he'd lead me down a subtle, carefully baited trail that led to my allowing that while, yes, we might someday encounter alien species with wild and fabulous ways, that right now, there was a slightly depressing homogeneity to the world.

On a fine spring day, I defended my thesis to two embodied humans and one prof whose body was out for an overhaul, whose consciousness was present via speakerphone from the computer where it was resting. They all liked it. I collected my sheepskin and went out hunting for Dan in the sweet, flower-stinking streets.

He'd gone. The Anthro major he'd been torturing with his war-stories said that they'd wrapped up that morning, and he'd headed to the walled city of Tijuana, to take his shot with the descendants of a platoon of US Marines who'd settled there and cut themselves off from the Bitch-un Society.

So I went to Disney World.

In deference to Dan, I took the flight in realtime, in the minuscule cabin reserved for those of us who stubbornly refused to be frozen and stacked like cordwood for the two hour flight. I was the only one taking the trip in realtime, but a flight attendant dutifully served me a urine-sample-sized orange juice and a rubbery, pungent, cheese omelet. I stared out the windows at the infinite clouds while the autopilot banked around the turbulence, and wondered when I'd see Dan next.

Chapter 1

My girlfriend was 15 percent of my age, and I was old-fashioned enough that it bugged me. Her name was Lil, and she was second-generation Disney World, her parents being among the original ad-hocracy that took over the management of Liberty Square and Tom Sawyer Island. She was, quite literally, raised in Walt Disney World and it showed.

It showed. She was neat and efficient in her every little thing, from her shining red hair to her careful accounting of each gear and cog in the animatronics that were in her charge. Her folks were in canopic jars in Kissimmee, deadheading for a few centuries.

On a muggy Wednesday, we dangled our feet over the edge of the Liberty Belle's riverboat pier, watching the listless Confederate flag over Fort Langhorn on Tom Sawyer Island by moonlight. The Magic Kingdom was all closed up and every last guest had been chased out the gate underneath the Main Street train station, and we were able to breathe a heavy sigh of relief, shuck parts of our costumes, and relax together while the cicadas sang.

I was more than a century old, but there was still a kind of magic in having my arm around the warm, fine shoulders of a girl by moonlight, hidden from the hustle of the cleaning teams by the turnstiles, breathing the warm, moist air. Lil plumped her head against my shoulder and gave me a butterfly kiss under my jaw.

"Her name was McGill," I sang, gently.

"But she called herself Lil," she sang, warm breath on my collarbones.

"And everyone knew her as Nancy," I sang.

I'd been startled to know that she knew the Beatles. They'd been old news in my youth, after all. But her parents had given her a thorough—if eclectic—education.

"Want to do a walk-through?" she asked. It was one of her favorite duties, exploring every inch of the rides in her care with the lights on, after the horde of tourists had gone. We both liked to see the underpinnings of the magic. Maybe that was why I kept picking at the relationship.

"I'm a little pooped. Let's sit a while longer, if you don't mind."

She heaved a dramatic sigh. "Oh, all right. Old man." She reached up and gently tweaked my nipple, and I gave a satisfying little jump. I think the age difference bothered her, too, though she teased me for letting it get to me.

"I think I'll be able to manage a totter through the Haunted Mansion, if you just give me a moment to rest my bursitis." I felt her smile against my shirt. She loved the Mansion; loved to turn on the ballroom ghosts and dance their waltz with them on the dusty floor, loved to try and stare down the marble busts in the library that followed your gaze as you passed.

I liked it too, but I really liked just sitting there with her, watching the water and the trees. I was just getting ready to go when I heard a soft ping inside my cochlea. "Damn," I said. "I've got a call."

"Tell them you're busy," she said.

"I will," I said, and answered the call subvocally. "Julius here."

"Hi, Julius. It's Dan. You got a minute?"

I knew a thousand Dans, but I recognized the voice immediately, though it'd been ten years since we last got drunk at the Gazoo together. I muted the subvocal and said, "Lil, I've got to take this. Do you mind?"

"Oh, no, not at all," she sarcased at me. She sat up and pulled out her crack pipe and lit up.

"Dan," I subvocalized, "long time no speak."

"Yeah, buddy, it sure has been," he said, and his voice cracked on a sob.

I turned and gave Lil such a look, she dropped her pipe. "How can I help?" she said, softly but swiftly. I waved her off and switched the phone to full-vocal mode. My voice sounded unnaturally loud in the cricket-punctuated calm.

"Where you at, Dan?" I asked.

"Down here, in Orlando. I'm stuck out on Pleasure Island."

"All right," I said. "Meet me at, uh, the Adventurer's Club, upstairs on the couch by the door. I'll be there in—" I shot a look at Lil, who knew the castmember-only roads better than I. She flashed ten fingers at me. "Ten minutes."

"Okay," he said. "Sorry." He had his voice back under control. I switched off.

"What's up?" Lil asked.

"I'm not sure. An old friend is in town. He sounds like he's got a problem."

Lil pointed a finger at me and made a trigger-squeezing gesture. "There," she said. "I've just dumped the best route to Pleasure Island to your public directory. Keep me in the loop, okay?"

I set off for the utilidor entrance near the Hall of Presidents and booted down the stairs to the hum of the underground tunnel-system. I took the slidewalk to cast parking and zipped my little cart out to Pleasure Island.

I found Dan sitting on the L-shaped couch underneath rows of faked-up trophy shots with humorous captions. Downstairs, castmembers were working the animatronic masks and idols, chattering with the guests.

Dan was apparent fifty plus, a little paunchy and stubbled. He had raccoon-mask bags under his eyes and he slumped listlessly. As I approached, I pinged his Whuffie and was startled to see that it had dropped to nearly zero.

"Jesus," I said, as I sat down next to him. "You look like hell, Dan."

He nodded. "Appearances can be deceptive," he said. "But in this case, they're bang-on."

"You want to talk about it?" I asked.

"Somewhere else, huh? I hear they ring in the New Year every night at midnight; I think that'd be a little too much for me right now."

I led him out to my cart and cruised back to the place I shared with Lil, out in Kissimmee. He smoked eight cigarettes on the twenty minute ride, hammering one after another into his mouth, filling my runabout with stinging clouds. I kept glancing at him in the rear-view. He had his eyes closed, and in repose he looked dead. I could hardly believe that this was my vibrant action-hero pal of yore.

Surreptitiously, I called Lil's phone. "I'm bringing him home," I subvocalized. "He's in rough shape. Not sure what it's all about."

"I'll make up the couch," she said. "And get some coffee together. Love you."

"Back atcha, kid," I said.

As we approached the tacky little swaybacked ranch-house, he opened his eyes. "You're a pal, Jules." I waved him off. "No, really. I tried to think of who I could call, and you were the only one. I've missed you, bud."

"Lil said she'd put some coffee on," I said. "You sound like you need it."

Lil was waiting on the sofa, a folded blanket and an extra pillow on the side table, a pot of coffee and some Disneyland Beijing mugs beside them. She stood and extended her hand. "I'm Lil," she said.

"Dan," he said. "It's a pleasure."

I knew she was ping-ponging his Whuffie and I caught her look of surprised disapproval. Us oldsters who predate Whuffie know that it's important; but to the kids, it's the world. Someone without any is automatically suspect. I watched her recover quickly, smile, and surreptitiously wipe her hand on her jeans. "Coffee?" she said.

"Oh, yeah," Dan said, and slumped on the sofa.

She poured him a cup and set it on a coaster on the coffee table. "I'll let you boys catch up, then," she said, and started for the bedroom.

"No," Dan said. "Wait. If you don't mind. I think it'd help if I could talk to someone ... younger, too."

She set her face in the look of chirpy helpfulness that all the second-gen castmembers have at their instant disposal and settled into an armchair. She pulled out her pipe and lit a rock. I went through my crack period before she was born, just after they made it decaf, and I always felt old when I saw her and her friends light up. Dan surprised me by holding out a hand to her and taking the pipe. He toked heavily, then passed it back.

Dan closed his eyes again, then ground his fists into them, sipped his coffee. It was clear he was trying to figure out where to start.

"I believed that I was braver than I really am, is what it boils down to," he said.

"Who doesn't?" I said.

"I really thought I could do it. I knew that someday I'd run out of things to do, things to see. I knew that I'd finish some day. You remember, we used to argue about it. I swore I'd be done, and that would be the end of it. And now I am. There isn't a single place left on-world that isn't part of the Bitchun Society. There isn't a single thing left that I want any part of."

"So deadhead for a few centuries," I said. "Put the decision off."

"No!" he shouted, startling both of us. "I'm done. It's over."

"So do it," Lil said.

"I can't," he sobbed, and buried his face in his hands. He cried like a baby, in great, snoring sobs that shook his whole body. Lil went into the kitchen and got some tissue, and passed it to me. I sat alongside him and awkwardly patted his back.

"Jesus," he said, into his palms. "Jesus."

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