

PROXY

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Beginning Sample Reading Segment

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The use of robotics as a replacement for human labor has reduced the once working-class people to a state of poverty, resulting in a near collapse of the world's capitalist economies. The United Nations struggles to maintain a moral global order as international business organization, Circos, uses control over labor robots and its sovereign financial might to manipulate power from impoverished governments.

A robot, with smooth contours and a domestic look, emerges from dark woods onto the street of a gated community. It walks beneath a streetlight in a methodical way, perfectly repeating its mechanical steps. Its white plastic shell reflects the glow of the overhead light, while shadows are cast down across its black screen face. It has no face, no eyes, nose or mouth, just a silent black screen hiding the mechanical parts and programming on the inside. A dog barks at it from behind the metal bars of a fence, but cowers away with a whimper and tucked tail when the machine twists its head and coldly looks over. The robot does not flinch, or stop walking until it reaches the front door of a house, where it extends its white plastic mechanical finger, rings the doorbell and stands absolutely still, waiting.

The sound of a dog barking behind the door is heard before it is opened by a little blonde girl in pigtails. The toy robot dog is next to her, barking at the robot guest. The two machines look at each other for a moment in silence as the little robot dog tilts its head to the side and its ears lift. Mr. Seals, home from his job running a Circos robot factory, and still wearing his suit and loosened tie, opens the door wider. He is surprised to see the robot, one of his own manufacturing, staring back at him from his porch. Before he can wonder too much about it, the robot's head

explodes destroying the front of the house and killing the man and little girl.

A political talk-show program is playing on a wallpaper-like TV screen. The public relations representative for the Circos Corporation is speaking:

“It is simply cost-effective. A business cannot be expected to compete in a free-market economy if it is disallowed from using the tools and technological advancements that its global competitors are using. The day it became cheaper for a robot to do the work instead of a minimum wage employee, it became financial suicide for any business to continue paying humans instead of using robots.”

His words are met by an opposing view, that of a political columnist: “But you are laying off millions of workers, and during the greatest economic depression in history, workers who have no other place to go. You care more for profits than for people!”

“Believe me, I go to church, pay my taxes, donate to food-drives, the works. This is not an issue of caring for humanity, it is an issue of financial and economic feasibility. A business can simply not employ humans and expect to survive. Nature of the beast - it's survival of the financial fittest.”

The screen shuts off, and the young man who was watching it stands up in his small studio apartment. He grabs his bag, and walks out of the building to the street. The city air is almost yellow, and has a stale futility in it, especially in this rundown, formerly industrial area.

Around the corner, the young man sees, and continues walking towards, a crowd of picketing people. They are protesting their own layoffs in front of the high chain-link fence surrounding their former factory.

“HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMANS WORK! – HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMANS WORK!”

Two large trucks push through the crowd and are let past the gate onto the factory grounds, where they park. Twenty identical humanoid robots march out of one truck, and line up in attention to be inspected by another robot that emerged from the factory. In eerie unison they all break formation, and begin unloading and re-loading materials to and from the factory and trucks.

The young man pauses for a moment to watch. He grips the factory's chain link fence, and leans up against it as if imprisoned by being on the outside. One hand clenches the metal above his face as the all-but-silent pain of the picketing people flickers in his eyes. After the moment passes, he peels away, and walks through and past the crowd. He enters a train terminal, and steps aboard heading for his destination.

Inside a government lecture hall, the young man finds a seat among fifty competing professional and academic hopefuls of varying ages. He looks

a little out of place: younger and less formal. It doesn't stop him from nodding pleasantly to a man in a suit next to him.

A man on the stage begins speaking, "May I have your attention, please? Congratulations: you fifty have been accepted into the Economic-Recovery-Planning-Preselection-Program, which has been mandated by the President. You are the 'Fresh Blood' in government that he is looking for. While interning through the selection program you will receive upgraded food, housing and transportation vouchers. At the end of this program, two of you will be selected for additional employment as assistants to Congressional Planning Committee board members. We are honored to have the current Head of the Committee here with us today, the incumbent Senator and recently announced presidential candidate, Senator Marshal Ronick."

The Senator approaches the podium, greeted by applause from the crowd, "Thank you. And yes, I hope to get all your votes in this year's election, especially if we are going to be working together." He lets a smile out from the corner of his otherwise serious face. "As the head of the economic recovery planning committee, you will be working directly under me. And, as mandated by the current administration, it will be a chance for you, as members of the general public, to express your concerns and suggestions to the elected congressional planning committee, as well as assist in the research and development of the plan which the committee decides upon. I look forward to working with you, and as President, enacting your plan. You are a fine group of Americans."

The Senator steps back from the podium to his security guards, as the first speaker reclaims the microphone. The young man's eyes do not leave the Senator as both of them exit the building through different doors along the same wall. On the street, the young man runs up behind the Senator and his security guards at their car, reaching into his pocket as he approaches.

"Senator," he calls.

The guards turn around first, and quickly draw handguns, fixing them on the vital parts of the young man. He stops, and pulls his hand from his pocket to reveal a business card.

The Senator breaks the tension, "It's not a good idea to run up on these boys, son... Spooks them."

"I just wanted to introduce myself, my name is Jonathan Schmidt."

Jonathan extends his arm with the business card. A security guard takes it in a gloved hand, and first waves a see-through x-ray scanning screen over it to check if it is a weapon. Finger prints are revealed, but nothing else. The guard hands it to the Senator. Jonathan continues: "Since you are starting your campaign, I thought you might need some help... I will vote for you, sir."

“Well, I like to keep my friends close.” The words ‘and enemies closer’ hang unsaid in the air, until the Senator says, “At ease boys,” allowing his guards to lower their weapons from Jonathan’s head.

“My odds of getting to work with the committee are pretty small. So if you have something else for me, maybe working on your campaign or running errands for you or something, I’ll take it.”

The Senator gives a smirking smile, “You have a spark, son, I’ll give you that. I might be able to use a new errand runner on the campaign. I’ll let you know when I need something.”

The Senator holds the card up as he says it, and then sits down inside the car and is driven away, leaving Jonathan alone on the sidewalk.

Back inside the Lecture hall, Jonathan sits down to hear the rest of what the speaker has to say.

“...Working within Government to solve these problems, you will be expected to conduct yourselves as upstanding citizens, and do what you believe is best for the people of your country. If you are in some way under the direction of any outside organization, be it corporate, fringe political, or otherwise, or if you come under the direction of such an organization during your work here, you are to notify your Project Head immediately, and no criminal penalties will be charged against you. Alright, thank you for your time, and I look forward to reading your input. Good day.”

A television screen displays the host of an interview show as he is introducing his guest:

“Tonight I have author Daniel Parkman, with his new book - The Ascent of Money. Daniel, this title leaves a lot to speculation. What is it that money is ascending to?”

“Money has been ascending to power over people, and government, since global commerce began. Global businesses are not limited to single countries, the way governments are, so businesses are able to grow bigger than the government authorities that once kept them in check, and now over-sized business has opened the flood gates of economic tyranny onto the globe. Money is ascending to power; it is a system of authority and society that is ascending to power.”

“So you believe the economic system to be a greater authority than the governing or legal system?”

“In so many words – yes, although the economic system is more the framework than the conduct, it does direct how society evolves, and currently, as capitalists, profitability is our roadmap.”

The young man watching the screen looks away from it and out the window as Jonathan walks past the building. He jumps up to catch him on the street.

“Hey Jon, how did the interview go?”

“Hi Joe. It wasn’t an interview. It was an orientation, and it went alright. I’m getting upgraded vouchers, and I met Senator Ronick.”
“That piece of trash was there! Wish you told me that yesterday. We could have gained some political leverage.” He holds his fingers out like a gun. “Pchoo.”

“I gave him my card. He’s the head of the economic committee I’m interning with.”

“He probably wouldn’t have a head anymore if I were there. Guys like him are why everything is so messed up. And now you’re going to work for him. You make me wonder what side you are on?”

“I’m on the right side. I want things to get better also. I just think working inside our government is better than trying to overthrow it. Democracy was built to evolve, so we can avoid fighting. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em... you know.”

“I joined the Resistance for the same reason. I couldn’t beat ‘em all on my own, so I joined up with enough people to do it... The government is for the rich, not for the people. You’re smart and have school, so you have good food vouchers, but try living on the regular slop with all of the drugs in it. The Resistance gives people real, organic food that grew out of the ground, and water without drugs and chemicals in it - that’s why people get sick, you know.”

“Yeah, maybe. But nobody knows who contaminated the water. It was probably terrorists, not our government.”

“I have a filter and particle tester, regardless.”

“I really don’t have time to think about it right now. I have to pack. I’m moving into the city for my internship. I got an upgraded housing voucher to live closer to work.”

“Congrats. I bet you’re happy to get out of this dump? Just don’t drink the water there, and you should be alright.”

“I think I will be okay.”

The two friends have to stop at the corner, and wait for the car traffic to pass.

“I should get back, but let me know if you need help moving.”

“Thanks, Joe. I might call you.”

“And good luck. Make everybody proud of you, okay.”

“I will try to.”

They shake hands. Then the light turns, and Jonathan steps into the street to cross it while Joe stays behind.

Joe yells to him, “Let me know if you want any food from the farm while you’re in the city. I can guarantee it won’t have any drugs in it... Unless you want some in there...”

Jonathan just smiles and keeps walking. Joe stands there on the corner for a moment, watching his friend walk away before turning around and going home.

The South American sun sets over a Circos factory building, which overshadows a former worker's camp turned shanty town. A sickly and thin native boy holds a plastic cup while struggling to pump the metal handle of a water-well. Before he can get the cup to his lips it is slapped away by a strong native man, who says to him, "It is death." The dying boy is so parched he cannot respond. The man and a handful of other armed men pile onto a jeep and drive towards the factory building. The boy picks up his cup, fills it again, and then sits down on the street next to the body of his dead mother. He takes a drink from his cup and looks ahead at the Circos building before nodding off. His eyes re-open some time later to the sight of the factory burning. The flames are spreading to the shacks and dwellings of the town, but the boy does not have the strength to run away.

Joe's eyes open from nightmare sleep as he gasps for air. A few beads of sweat have materialized on his forehead. He is lying on his bed, fully clothed on top of the covers. Someone knocks on his bedroom door. He answers it to see a group of his rebel friends dressed in dark camouflage, and holding guns. The leader of them says, "The security system is down. We're doing it tonight."