

TEXT ADVENTURE

'GRID'

by
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Lieber

1

Actually, my armchair is quite sophisticated.

I've heard all the criticisms, but the handling is superb. Armor competitive with the industry standard. High bandwidth and low TCO.

Anyway, it works for me.

I'm able to navigate the Iron Triangle.

Nana, the company and the war. From my armchair I can keep an eye on how these pieces are moved around the board. I may not understand it all, but at least I'm creating a record. On playback, someone else can worry about the details.

Enter Slake Bottom.

Contractor, yes. Construction worker, no. I was mistaken, before, when I thought she was needling him about paint swatches. He wasn't really here to remodel the kitchen. Likely that chatter was solely for my benefit.

Too many hours in her bedroom with the door locked. I'm not fooled.

I've had a chance to gather more data. There's been a lot of travel in and out of the basement, as of late. They've been working in Eastern Europe to develop some new system of control. Something having to do with biological warfare. Targeted kind. Genetically? I don't know. Nana is here and gone seemingly on a daily basis. Sometimes she's in and out so quickly she leaves her bedroom door unlocked. Trusts me, I guess. I've nosed around a bit, but I can't make sense of her papers. As usual, the particulars are above my head.

Must be why they call this the basement.

2

"Crack is here, it's just not evenly distributed yet."

The Vizier ran a disciplined subgovernment. For the most part.

Historically speaking, he appeared to be a genius of organizational planning. Multiple clone processes spawned, he was able to manage parallel events at an astonishing level of complexity. He suffered comparatively few crashes. Additionally, he'd found a way to manage his personal habits. A new supplier meant less resources tasked to acquisition. These fellows wore strange clothing but showed up on time and never ran out of product. Claimed to be from New York. Unlikely that it was any New York he had ever known.

The Vizier felt reasonably certain his thoughts were under control.

"We were just thinking the same thing. Shall we pursue this then, after lunch?"

The Vizier took a light touch with his staff. Let them set their own schedules. The method had served him well in the old country.

"Sounds fine. How about that new barbecue place uptown. Don't forget to clock out."

3

Three weeks in.

Slake Bottom ran his hand over the boy's face, mussed his hair. This triggered a minimal reflex action in the child's legs.

"Sit still," he commanded.

Lunsford, undeterred, continued to squirm.

Slake shook his head. He withdrew his bladed instrument and replaced the lid of Lunsford's skull. Tapped him lightly on the chest to let him know he was finished.

The boy sat up.

"I've allowed my body to fail me again, sir," said Lunsford.

"Try not to think of it as pain. You're always so focused on the negative. Need to develop more diverse perspectives."

"Unfortunately, I've got this unshakable grip on reality," said Lunsford.

Slake Bottom lit a cigarette.

"We're pushing your immune system past its limits. We need you in the proper frame of mind."

"I'm trying, sir. I want to do my best. For the country. It's just that I can't stop these ideas from coming into my head. I can't go to sleep. I just keeping thinking about what all this might mean, where we really are, who I really am. It's a lot to for someone my age to take in."

Slake took a drag on his cigarette. Went back to work, sterilizing his equipment.

"We know, son."

4

The old woman has found my armchair.

Unauthorized equipment. Strictly forbidden.

Evasive maneuvers useless. Tried to bargain with her, to no avail. Offered to stop taking notes while on the clock. She wasn't having any of it. She could stop me taking notes any time she wanted to, she said.

Drag the chair up, through the floor. Out to the curb. Don't really want to leave it up here. Classified technology. But, she won't let me back in unless I prove it's out of reach. She's given me a lot of second chances.

Back in the closet, rubbing on the floor. Carpet looks different. A pattern. Shape of a grid.

What *is* the shape of a grid? Beats me. Look at the carpet. Answers all questions.

The floor opens up and I crawl back through.

Something is different. Lighting? The smell?

Back suddenly sore.

Into my room. Lay down on the bed and try to read the ceiling.

Not sure what's happening to me.

