

Imago Mundi

by stephen hastings-king

They called the building the Plutocraft and said it would take them to the outer limits back before the destination was downgraded to a remote ball of ice and they were left with nothing but a bad joke.

But the name stuck. And the building's profile is vaguely that of a spaceship with steering mechanisms located in the penthouses and lower floors of long corridors lined with offices in which functionaries perform operations that center on pasting information from one software platform into another while in the basement rows of monitors are filled with columns of numbers, on the left static on the right spinning.

If you hold that map of the world up to a mirror you see networks of long roads lined with low cement buildings in which creative destruction holds the heads of entire populations beneath the surface of the water in bathtubs until the bubbles stop. But each thinks something else is about to happen. So they go willingly. And the drowning doesn't take long. But still, it is a bit of a strain and that is why you avoid mirrors.

You look up from your martini, loosen your tie and survey the array of people around the bar as if the situation was a map of itself and you are above it, translating the symbols and when the woman next to you whose name has grown hazy leans over and whispers "Tell me something" you do not respond but instead correlate inwardly her staccato speech with details made from slurring, the curious synchronization between her facial movements and utterances and the shadow puppet play of her hands as nearby a couple 1 and 2 approaches a man, 3, sitting by himself between two empty chairs 5, 6. 1 says: Would you mind moving over one please? We just got married. 3 says: You think you're better than me? You think you're entitled? Well, I have dignity. I have worth. You can't just walk in here and push me around. The woman next to you whispers to you again in her curiously detailed staccato: Tell me something nice while 1 says, gesturing toward 5 and 6: But the seats

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to either side of you are open and 3 says: Yeah, well... and, as he moves over: Fuck you anyway.

