What was it about these blue ones that so terrified him? They had stoic, feature free faces as far as BØB could read “featureless” through a maze of spotted, deeply creviced epidermal membrane. He’d inhabited the PO complex often enough at off-peak hours to understand something of their frequent comings and goings. Having the look of weary travelers or civil servants, a cuckoo couple on a stroll, they exacted total indifference in passers-by, human and other-than. Their imperceptibility drew his keen curiosity, as they exuded a state of being hovering somewhere between a not-yet displaced and soon-to-be disappeared. The bland transparency of their presence, even as they struggled with the industrial grade moving cart on their slow walks through the building, could not disguise the weight of inevitability that hung from their heavy coats whose large interior pockets, he knew, held their daily stash of edibles.

BØB had witnessed them often in the rotunda picking through the same disposables that whet his own appetite: spongy Twinkie bits, stale French fries, peanut butter slabs, sugary doughnut holes, yellow bits of scrambled eggs and leathery chicken wing remains. In a sense, they were competitors for the spoiled spoils of the accelerated ones.
He’d been spying on others like them, this particular breed of the dispossessed. Wrapped in relics of military issue outerwear from powdery blue to the deepest ultramarine, they inhabited City’s non-places much as he himself did. Necessary scavengers, bottom feeders. They were the un-bred, conceived through chromosomal happenstance. The Blue Ones were the most conspicuous contrast to designer GenTels, an advertising euphemism of the most obnoxious sort. (GenTel being the popular acronym for the Genetic Teleology Corps, the eugenics conglomerate that merged their research laboratories with Pharmakos Pharmaceuticals towards the end of the last century.) With the exploding global mandate for designer progeny, GenTel’s engineering research centers required an enormous surfeit of test subjects. These specimens, of which *Rattus norvegicus* was in particularly high demand, were supplied almost entirely by an international cadre of blue ones.

Privately, they referred to themselves as Tuaregs. Unaware of inappropriate appropriation it brought them heightened self-esteem, adorned their abject situation with a solid nomadic attitude they could take pride in. They were conspicuous because of the equipment they laboriously lugged around to accomplish the task that would put food in their bodies three, sometimes four times a week. B≈B knew, as did the whole of his tribe, their profession. They were the Rat Catchers.

B≈B was certain these two had been present at his epiphany. He knew they carried nets, cages, ultrasonic emitters, poisoned arrows, tasers, tranquilizer guns, pan pipes, and flutes of every material type (wooden, silver, steel, aluminum, alloy). The coup de grâce, their weapon of mass destruction, was a semi-sedated Bull Terrier pup trained in the blood sport of rat-baiting. They’d named him Billy in adoring reference to the prodigious nine-
teenth-century raticide champion, a cross-species legend who could dispose of over 100 rats in well under six minutes. Blue Billy was carted along for occasions when all other techniques were deemed inappropriate or likely to fail. B&B could tell the keepers had come become fond of this mutt.

In this particular pockmark of timespace the blue ones are required to wear a pink badge with the letters PC inscribed in Helvetica Bold font. B&B is aware this stands for Pest Control, the post-postmodern facelift of a profession as old as prostitution. The semiotic genealogy of this identifier functions as a ridiculous teaser. He’s noticed that quite often, the blue ones bury the badge away in a pocket. He figures its invisibility offers them some semblance of being off-duty in an always-on world.

That must have been the case that day on the Path. They left him there, foregoing a tidy bit of compensation, badges deep inside their crumb-caked pockets. Did they know they had passed by a queer specimen, the celebrated Sounder, a perfect case study for a doctoral candidate in Applied Health Sciences or worse, a contestant for an illegal rat-baiting ring? Did they know, or think they knew, the character of that stunned rat body, leaving him to escape or expire on a coin toss of fate? Were they hyper-alert that morning or dull tired? Had they attuned to his species? Had they developed a wavering empathy?

Content to speculate, to create one viable scenario out of many possibilities, B&B chose, as is his want, in the affirmative. He granted them an animal sensibility of fair play he suspected was often dormant in humans. Generally speaking, in the nonhuman view a hunt is a hunt, a predator a predator, a kill a kill, a meal a meal. No tears, no wringing of paws, claws, or tendrils. Though there are exceptions of course, moral coding is unambiguous.
The human species has complicated the planet with the evolution of relativistic ethics. He has tried to wrap his head around human behavior patterns but can make little sense of their inconsistencies. BØB’s type long ago adapted to the indeterminate inevitabilities of mortality.