

Gotham City, Zone III, 2085

by James LePore (July 2016)



Photo by James LePore

When the brain chip was invented and put into use that was the beginning of the end. They're probably listening to me right now as I write this. If not, their key-word engine will alert them to me very quickly, probably before I'm done typing. I just have to *think* one or two of the Forbidden Words, and I'll be flagged within minutes. So here goes: *black, white, undocumented, hate, politics, disabled, fat, ugly, gender, girl, boy, man, woman, America, religion, freedom*. The List of Forbidden Words isn't published, which gives them a lot of flexibility. You have to guess at it, but I'd bet my life those words are on it.

Of course they control the internet, so what I have to say will have absolutely no effect on anyone. I'll print as many copies as I can and throw them off the roof of my building, then I'll throw myself after them. Better that than the new implant I hear they're developing, the one that will give them control over what you think and say, as opposed to just the ability to listen in. In a few years, they will be doing our thinking for us.

My implant was put in late in life, when I was twenty. My parents never had them. Before my operation, they talked freely to me about many things, using all of the Forbidden Words. Of course they couldn't publicize anything. They'd be arrested. They didn't do me any favors though, because I keep on remembering them and much of what they had to say, and just as regularly get summonses to appear before the Forbidden Word Court. As an adult implantee, I've been treated leniently, there being an exception in the law for involuntary memories. They're inserting the implants at birth now, and when the new implant is perfected, well, that will be the end of the end, so to speak. It's hard not to think certain words, and the Forbidden Word Court is a tremendously expensive government program, which is obviously why the new implant is being developed.

You must be wondering who the "they" are that I keep referring to. The answer is simple. The government employees who live in gated rings around the capital cities of our country's four Zones, the biggest by far is what used to be called

Washington, D.C., in Zone I. They don't have implants. They get to watch whatever movies they want, read whatever books they want, talk freely among themselves, travel freely around the world, where they can mingle with their counterparts in what used to be called Europe, Africa, South America and Asia. My parents told me you used to be able to apply for a job with the government. That merit (another Forbidden Word) had something to do with it. Amazing. Now it's all hereditary

I hear helicopters overhead. I hadn't thought of that. But I'm on the twentieth floor, and have worked diligently to saw through two of the steel bars on my one window. Sharp objects are illegal, but I still have my mom's old Bakelite butter knives with the serrated edges. I should say I *had* them. I used all twenty-four to cut through the bars. I would shoot myself but personal ownership of guns, except by government employees, was banned before I was born. So I'll just jump. I own my life, after all. Maybe there will be something better in the afterlife. That's a word—afterlife—that everyone knows is high on the List of Forbidden Words. Using it or thinking it will land you in prison for ten years. I hear they're thinking of bringing back the death penalty for just the use of that word. I can understand why. Life here sucks so bad that if the concept of an afterlife were to go viral, there would be mass suicide all over the world. Then what would government employees do? Who would they live off of? Those are rhetorical questions. They'd probably commit suicide themselves rather than have to get real jobs and support themselves.

Now there's banging on my door.

Goodbye. Hope to see you in the afterlife.

James LePore practiced law for twenty-plus years, then turned to writing fiction and taking pictures full time in 1999. In 2009 his first novel, *A World I Never Made*, was published by The Story Plant. Four others, in what LePore calls *The Invictus Cycle*, followed. He has written a book of short stories called *Anyone Can Die*, a volume of flash fiction (*Blood, Light and Time*) that evolved from a series of blog posts, and three historical novels, with the screenwriter Carlos

Davis, featuring J.R.R. Tolkien and Ian Fleming in WW2 espionage adventures. His latest release is a novella entitled *Breathe in Grace*. His website is [here](#).

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