ADRIAN VAN YOUNG

# LONG PIG

When Spence goes to open the petting zoo's doors on what he assumes is its last day in business, he discovers MacFarquhar, the petting zoo keeper, lying in blood with his ring finger missing.

Spence gets close. Inspects the wound. The finger has been gnawed away.

The pigs and sheep and goats Spence owns that aren't quite pigs and sheep and goats are mounded in their separate pens.

MacFarquhar's been drinking. That's why he's asleep. He reeks of serf-

moonshine, B.O. underneath it. He's half-tipped over on a bench that faces the pens, where the eTures bed down, his arm splayed out across the bench. The arm extends in such a way its wrist and fingers twist up, slightly, in the brisk attitude of a concert conductor.

The finger shows a ridge of bone. Blood pumps from the hollow encasing the joint.

"MacFarquhar, MacFarquhar," Spence says, drawing closer.

Spence doesn't need to address him by name, but still he does it out of

habit. MacFarquhar has one, after all; the fed listed it on the DSAT (Department of Serf Acquisition and Tenure) when Spence logged on to select him.

Spence should elevate the hand, but it already is more or less. So he leaves it.

Next Spence goes to check the eTures, who never fail to sour his mood, reminders as they are of the failed enterprise over which he is sovereign and by extension all mankind: the petting zoo, open for nearly a decade.

The petting zoo, once inundated by seekers.

The petting zoo, now: un-trafficked, insolvent.

He'd first put up money to open the place from returns on investments he'd made in the first couple months of the Great Cross-Extinction and, where it was needed, the extra he'd saved to one day send Emmie, his daughter, to college. Most of Spence's

investments had been in biotech, which was the industry responsible for creating the eTures. So thanks to Spence and others like him, gazing onto far horizons, when the last several species turned up as endangered, the technology had been long in the works.

The dying took place with no set hierarchy, though most people thought it started with livestock, worked its way across from there.

Reptiles, rodents. Insects. Birds. Felines and canines of all shapes and types. By the time it spread to the largest land mammals and begun to show up in the ones in the sea, Spence stopped watching the news coverage of it.

Now Spence stands before the pens, two prods in his right hand and one in his left; each genus of eTure requires its own prod, tailored to its nervous system.

The blood pools and drips from the zookeeper's bench, but none of the eTures appear to need prodding. Asleep isn't how Spence would put it. In sleep mode? The eTures do need to be charged, after all: a USB-chord running in through their rectums, connected to the charging hub, the hub itself, a black rectangle with a blue power cylinder sheathed in its middle, sitting in the charging bay between Spence's office and where the pens sit, which is MacFarquhar's living quarters—a courtyard covered by a tarp.

MacFarquhar's bench defines this space, sweatpants-inside-sweatpants bunched up for a pillow. Everything else—MacFarquhar's dishes, MacFarquhar's books and magazines, a jar of whatever MacFarquhar's been drinking—must fit beneath the bench and does.

Spence moves among the eTure pens, looking for MacFarquhar's finger, but the digit is nowhere in any of them. Can the eTures have eaten it up altogether?

All that belies them as lawn ornaments is a faint humming sound at the centers of them. The pigs' snouts are faintly wet, their mouths arranged in secret smiles. The goats with their little legs tucked up beneath them.

Spence returns to MacFarquhar, beginning to stir.

"MacFarquhar," Spence whispers again with annoyance

Spence nudges Macfarquhar's left flank with his knee.

"Right!" MacFarquhar says, "I'm up."

"What happened?" says Spence.

“Holy hell,” says MacFarquar. He unkinks his body and slowly rises. His discomfort appears to have gone to his head, which he rubs with the sting of the badly hung-over. “One of the goats,” MacFarquhar says. “Got me when I wasn’t looking.”

Of course this would happen today of all days, with so much to do before closing the zoo. With so many closing promotions at stake and one ceremony to mark the occasion: a glossy banner to be hung, a three-for-one charge on unlimited petting, a “Westminster eTure Show” (Spence’s concept) complete with a grand promenade and prize ribbons, as well as a speech he’d been writing for days and would deliver that night on the petting zoo’s steps with all of the eTures assembled below him.

In it, Spence will speak of “hope,” the “grit to fight another day.”

Emmie, his daughter, has promised she’ll be there. Or anyway Emmie’s mom, Kay, promised Spence, who’d divorced him around when he’d started the zoo, the Great Cross-Extinction in full swing by then. The divorce’s intense acrimony aside, her timing always struck Spence as unkind.

Today is the first day in quite a long time that Emmie will come visit Spence at the zoo. This maybe has something to do with the fact he’d taken a downswing along with his business, living sleepless in his office on potato chips and scotch, yet much more likely his ex-wife, who’s never given Spence a chance.

So Spence must admit that he’s nervous today. MacFarquhar’s finger isn’t helping.

He examines MacFarquhar still rubbing his head, trying to cut off blood flow to his hand. That’s when it comes to him MacFarquhar passed out probably not from the moonshine he drank but the pain.

“How did he get out?” says Spence.

“He didn’t,” MacFarquhar says, “this was at dinner.”

“Dinner?” says Spence.

“While I had them plugged in. That one there.” MacFarquhar points to one of the goats, which could be any of them, except for the fact it’s the only one standing. It stands toward the back of the pen, its head raised. Spence can see its eyes shining at brief intervals when it twitches its head as though listening for something.

“How long’s it been like that?” says Spence.

“Few hours now,” MacFarquhar says. “How long I been sleeping?”

But Spence doesn’t answer. “After it bit off your finger, what happened?”

MacFarquhar shrugs, grimaces. “Oh, not a lot. I rounded them up, put them back in their pens. That’s when I started getting drunk.”

Spence pauses a moment, intent on MacFarquhar.

That MacFarquhar decided to finish his chores isn’t what surprises Spence. What does surprise Spence—what impresses him, even—is that he was able to do it at all.

“Something wrong?” says MacFarquhar.

Spence smiles. “Not at all. Let’s get you bandaged up,” he says.

After tending MacFarquhar, Spence puts up the banner.

He posts the unlimited petting promotion. He sets up the “Westminster eTures Show” run and arranges the ribbons inside a vitrine. Standing before the bathroom mirror, he even rehearses his speech several times, but is shocked by how little conviction is in it. The parts of the speech that at first had so moved him, peppered with words like “hope” and “moxie,” die off in his earholes as patently false. So he tries to recite it as though to his daughter—Emmie, eleven, no, twelve by that point. As though where he sees himself, Emmie is standing, in the sweater she wears with the ears on the hood and the claws on the sleeves that Spence finds so off-putting, because it reminds him of what’s dead and gone.

MacFarquhar helps Spence with the zoo preparations, wincing under his hand and his raging hangover. Spence must say the bandage job he did on the zookeeper’s hand is half-decent, what remains of the joint stabilized with a splint and only a few spots of blood showing through. Before he’d wrapped and tucked the bandage, Spence had even attempted to trim back the skin that the jaws of the eTures left hanging ragged. MacFarquhar breathed in sharply, once.

MacFarquhar is tougher than Spence had imagined.

But so are the eTures, which makes Spence uneasy. Colder, more brutal, like actual creatures. Spence tries to think back if he’s heard of more cases of eTures attacking a live human being and can’t think of any outright, though there must be.

The eTure simulacrum is purportedly exact, right down to the muscles, the teeth, and the hooves.

Only the eTures’ brains are synthetic, and part of the spine, threading into the flesh.

The rest of the body—the blood, fat, and tissue—is a fully regenerative cellular casing stimulated by signals that come from the brain. These signals are electrical, hence the eTures' trademark name. And hence, too, the barely discernible humming that so many mistake for breath.

The trickle of seekers starts early that day. Slightly more of them than normal.

Spence calls them seekers because they are seeking some vestige of the world they knew, a world that used to have many things in it apart from high primates deserted by luck. Most of the seekers are, tellingly, children, and today they come into the zoo in short bursts: shrieking, writhing, holding hands with siblings or schoolmates or one/both parents, veering here and charging there, pointing at everything, tugging each other, slightly damp from the rain that is falling outside, their hair tangled, their glasses fogged.

MacFarquhar hangs back at the edges of things.

Just left of the door, in his zookeeper's suit, cradling his bandaged hand, he watches the children go into the zoo, pay their fares at the booth and go on to the pens. Spence has never quite trusted MacFarfquhar with children, though nothing he's done has been cause for concern. It's more just a feeling Spence gets—an unwellness.

MacFarquhar's eyes a bit too steady as he watches the children make off toward the pens.

MacFarquhar's smile a bit too sweet as he outfits the children with paddling brushes so they won't pick up crud from the eTures' fur.

Spence never chose MacFarquhar as his serf. MacFarquhar was assigned to Spence after the Great Cross-Extinction was over, his name among the many names of the world's livestock farmers made to pay reparations for supposedly starting the Great Cross-Extinction when a pathogen strain masked as a hormone was introduced into the cow population.

Or was it the pigs? Spence can never be sure. No one really is, in fact.

The animals were dying off and someone had to take the blame.

Emmie comes through the door not with Kay but with Beaufort, Emmie's stepfather, who Spence doesn't care for. Spence can only assume Kay herself never comes because she can't stand being in Spence's presence so she always sends Beaufort, her lame emissary, to yuck it up and bond with Spence while keeping an eye, very subtly, on Emmie.

The petting zoo's a single room: admission booth just past the entrance, the three eTure pens, separated by species, organized beyond the booth.

Emmie and Beaufort walk straight up to Spence, who's running cards and making change before giving people their tickets to enter. He starts to come around to Emmie, but something displeased in her eyes warns him off, so he awkwardly pivots back where he was standing, reaches down to fluff her hair. "Hey there, sweetheart," Spence says.

"Hi, Dad," Emmie answers. Beneath her bangs her eyes flash up.

"How goes it, Doctor Spence?" says Beaufort, indulging an unfunny habit he has of calling Spence "Doctor" because of the zoo, like Spence must need a PhD to care for robot pigs and goats. "I wish this were all under better conditions, but you had a good run of it, didn't you, Doc?"

Spence turns to his daughter, hands shoved in her hoodie.

"So, what," says Spence and cuffs her lightly. "You want to go see Mr. Oinks-a-lot first?"

Mr. Oinks-a-lot is Emmie's favorite, the biggest eTure in the zoo. When Emmie came to the zoo in years past, she would always go pet Mr. Oinks-a-lot first, cooing over his rump with her paddle brush, whispering.

"Mr. Oinks-a-lot's gross," Emmie says. "He's a monster."

Spence feels his face twisting into a scowl. "That's suddenly an issue for you?"

Emmie rolls her eyes at Spence and turns to look around the zoo.

Beaufort kneels before Emmie and flicks at her bangs. "Hey, monsters can be cool," he says. "Aren't I a cool monster?" Beaufort pulls a face. "How about now?" He pulls another.

"You're such a dork, Beaufort," Emmie says, but even Spence can see she's smiling.

Spence follows Beaufort and Emmie along toward the pens where the children commune with the eTures. He swears he can feel the damp eyes of MacFarquhar tracking them across the floor, but when Spence looks back at his serf, he's off, walking. Demonstratively busy completing some task.

When they get to the pens Emmie stops and stands slouched. She seems so blasé, so resistant to joy. That can't be healthy for her, can it? Chalk it up to Kay's influence.

He’s so sidetracked observing her he almost doesn’t see the children. They’re closing in a narrow skirt around the goat-pen, whispering. Awed.

Spence isn’t sure of the moment in time the petting zoo began to fail. It may not have been a particular moment but rather a long and depressing accrual—the crowds going from loud and spilling, to suddenly smaller but no cause for panic, to abysmal and echoing late in year eight, when Spence started noticing revenue problems. At first, he didn’t quite know why. His eTures were top-of-the-line in the biz. He ran the place clean. He charged sober admission. When one day he noticed a father and daughter of roughly his and Emmie’s age standing in front of the sheep pen, despondent. Their heads tilted, their faces slack. “It’s not really the same—is it, sweetie?” said the father.

Not a week after that, Spence finally relented, ordering MacFarquhar from the DSAT. He’d always resisted the notion of serfdom—on moral/ethical grounds, okay, sure, but also in terms of his own self-sufficiency. He’d never needed anyone to help him run the petting zoo. At least MacFarquhar, in his serfdom, had never cost more than it took to feed him, heat his quarters, change his bench-clothes.

Spence pulls his daughter through the kids, her stepdad Beaufort close behind them. There’s something magic going on, the children’s movements slow, deliberate, like whatever it is they’re thronging toward might vanish if they go too fast.

In front of the crowd is the very same goat that took MacFarquhar’s finger from him. And the goat is resplendent. Its coat shines in glory. Its musculature is a study in contour. Its eyes spark with this greenish orange, its slotted pupils glossy black. Even how it stands there is more lithe, more alive: its forelegs tensed, its rump perked faintly.

“She’s a pretty one, huh?” Beaufort comments to Emmie, but Emmie isn’t looking at him.

She’s looking at Spence with this light in her eyes. “I love him,” she says to her father. “I love him!”

Counting the box at the end of the day, Spence finds that the zoo has done such ample business he could, if he wanted to, open tomorrow, maybe into the start of the following week.

“How’s the hand?” Spence asks MacFarquhar.

At the end of MacFarquhar’s bed/bench, Spence sits down.

The petting zoo is closed for now. The bathrooms cleaned, the pastures swept.

MacFarquhar is resting, his head on the sweatpants, his hand elevated on top of his chest.

“I’ll be honest,” says MacFarquhar, “a lot better with all five fingers.”

“Probably time to change that dressing.” Spence sets a first aid kid on top of the bench. “Here,” he says, leans in. “Let me.”

MacFarquar sits up and Spence gathers in closer.

Slowly, Spence unwraps the bandage, watching MacFarquhar for signs of distress. The angry stump has started crusting, the bone of it mottled partway under scab. Spence judges he did a good job with the scissors: The skin around the wound is clean. When Spence is done coating his serf’s hand with ointment and cocooning the hand to the wrist in fresh gauze, he sees that MacFarquhar is gritting his teeth.

“You look like you could use a drink.”

MacFarquhar surveys him a moment in silence. “I got my own,” MarFarquhar says.

He brings up a jam jar from under the bench and starts to unscrew it, but Spence waves him off.

“Not that I can say too much after how you hurt your hand, but isn’t that moonshine a no-no?” says Spence.

“Sorry, jefe,” says MacFarquhar.

“Can I ask where you got it?” Spence says.

“Down the way.”

“From Perkins or Standish?” Spence says.

No response; MacFarquhar only grins at Spence.

Perkins and Standish are neighboring serfs, indentured to people within walking distance, but the serfs are tight-lipped in regards to their business, their clandestine networks, their little rebellions.

“Never mind.” Spence pats MacFarquhar. “Got something better. You sit tight.”

When he returns moments later with a bottle of scotch, MacFarquhar is sitting erect on the bench. Beyond the bench the sleeping pens, where the eTures lie charged and

corralled for the night. Or all of the eTures except for the goat, who stands alone of all its kind. Infused with a strange and directionless vigor that will not let it rest its head. Eyes shining faintly in the dim, its head cocked to the slightest sound.

By the time Spence is fully attuned to its presence, he sees that MacFarquhar has been for some time. One of his eyes never moves from the goat, its pupil huge and dark with dread.

Spence pours them each a few fingers of scotch. MacFarquhar gulps his down; Spence sips. Spence tilts the bottle at MacFarquhar, and MacFarquhar nods gingerly at him: “Thanks, jefe.”

Spence pours him three fingers this time and sits back. “Where we you before you came here?”

“With a family.”

“They treat you well?”

MacFarquhar shrugs. “Didn’t work me too hard, so I guess so,” he says.

“How about before that?”

“In a warehouse,” he says.

Spence sips his drink. “I don’t mean that. I mean before before,” he says.

“Pig farm,” says MacFarquhar. “I run it myself. We really never talked about it?”

Spence shakes his head at MacFarquhar. “No, sir.”

The liquor spills up to the rim of the glass before vanishing into MacFarquhar’s dark mouth. “Woo-wee,” he says. “Now that’s the stuff.”

His eyes have begun to look slightly decentered. He gestures for Spence to please pour him another.

“Ten or so acres,” he says, “in the country. Ran a tight little slaughter. Real nice operation.”

“What happened?” says Spence.

“You’re asking me. One day they up and took it from me.”

MacFarquhar sips his third glass slower, watching the eTures at rest in their pens. He looks contemplative to Spence, possessed of some vital and rarified wisdom.

“So,” says Spence, “what do you think?” MacFarquhar slits his eyes, unsure. “You think it was justified—what they did to you? You think the farmers caused all this?”

MacFarquhar’s eyes relax; he smiles. “Who cares what I think,” he says.

On the following day, Spence reopens the zoo.

At first, he feels foolish unlocking the doors, repurposing the closing banner so it reads “Grand Reopening” scrawled on the back, thoroughly cleaning the whole premises, in particular the area between Spence’s office and the pens where the eTures bed down for the night, but the people start coming by ones and by twos. Then after lunch they come in scores. At quarter past one Spence checks the rolls and counts an intake of well over two hundred. Spence imagines this might be because of the swerve from being closed to being open, the unexpected novelty that arises in the vacuum of something revoked being offered again.

But really Spence knows it’s because of the eTures: the goat that took MacFarquhar’s finger, but also two sheep and the giant prize pig named Mr. Oinks-a-lot by Emmie. Word has spread, Spence assumes, that these eTures are different.

And the eTures are different, in curious ways.

The goat still has its shimmer-fur, its sculpted contours and its pert way of standing, but these have been joined by a fresh energy, a habit of prancing and sniffing around and a playfulness, even, among the ranked children, who stand at the margins and ruffle its back. As for the sheep, they are creampuffs, meringues; their heads sleek and black, their fur buttered and springy.

But Mr. Oinks-a-lot’s the prince.

Immense and voluptuous, shifting his bulk, as though daring the seekers to kill and devour him. His crinkly and bursting soufflé of a tummy; his debonair ears, one of them drooping slightly; his little, mincing, black-tipped legs that present the appearance when he walks of infinitesimally hovering forward.

Even Emmie, lukewarm on him just yesterday, appears besotted once again.

Again she arrives at the zoo with her stepdad, leading him on through the doors like a dope. Spence can’t remember the last time he’s seen her two times in a span of consecutive days, which means that if she’s here, again, then coming was her own idea.

Spence watches her as she stands with her stepdad, watching Mr. Oinks-a-lot be fawned over, giggling. Beaufort leans down to make jokes in her ear but Emmie doesn't even hear him, always turning around for her father, for Spence, to grin at him and puff her cheeks in a child's mirroring of the monster before her.

It makes Spence ecstatic. But also uneasy.

Can Mr. Oinks-a-lot be trusted to not harm the children? Can any of the eTures, in their new dispositions?

Spence decides it will be fine.

After lunch he asks Beaufort to supervise things, hunkers down in his office behind his computer. When the DSAT website has Spence list the reason MacFarquhar's indenture did not "come to term" from a dropdown of reasons prescribed by the site that range from "Displayed antisocial behavior" to "Refused to work" to "Exhibited incompetence," Spence selects it: "Serf absconded."

The confirmation page assures that Spence's case will be reviewed.

For now there's only Emmie, though. When Spence comes back onto the floor, she's still with Mr. Oinks-a-lot. A huge group of saucer-eyed children surrounds her. The overripe pig struts in front of the children, its mouth twisted into brainless half-smile.

Spence comes behind Emmie and seizes her waist; she leans back in her father's arms. He drenches his nose in her hair. It's still there: fruit shampoo with notes of salt.

A recollection comes to Spence, like a jerky quick cut in a film, and then gone: Spence throwing a mop bucket over the floor between his office and the pens, the hot water sluicing over the concrete, pushing out a tide of blood.

"He looks real, Daddy," Emmie says. "Is he—" she hesitates "—can he be real?"

"No," says Spence. "But let's pretend. Let's pretend that he is for as long as we can."

Mr. Oinks-a-lot reminds Spence of something. What is it?

Long pig: the name for human meat.

Spence peers over Emmie, sees Beaufort beyond, who's smiling rigidly at Spence, his hand balancing on the top of the pigpen. Clownish, sloppy seconds Beaufort, as fake as the eTures corralled in their yards.

It’s not hard to imagine him slipping, careening. Spence would pull him out, of course. But it’s not hard for Spence to imagine it happening, how Emmie would laugh and how Spence would feel bad.

He leaves his daughter, goes to Beaufort. Puts his hand on Beaufort’s arm. “Kids,” says Spence. “It takes a village.”

Beaufort only nods at first, but then he remembers his manners: “Sure, Doc.”

Only because he’s so pathetic, Spence will have to invite the man over for drinks. It will probably be awkward between them at first, the potential for growing uncivil enormous. But Spence will have to toe the line. He’ll have to be the better man.