

Chapter 2

The Trainees

There was a voice on the intercom announcing an important meeting. Doug missed some of it, because the first part was obscured by a daydream. He imagined himself flying along the Pacific Coast Highway in a convertible two-seater, a futuristic model, like a cross between a Beemer and an F117 fighter. It was red, of course. The daydream was inspired by an image on Doug's computer screen, a photo he once took of Half Moon Bay in California.

Unfortunately, a daydream was all he would get. The real thing was 3,000 miles away. Doug was now sitting at his desk in Boston, where he had been since 6:00 AM. The announcement said there would be more information by email, which was fortunate.

Something else caught his eye on one of the computer screens. Right under the words, "Mailbox - Douglas J. Wilson", was a folder that read, "Inbox". It was in bold type, to indicate a new message. He didn't open it.

Doug looked back at the screen shot of Half Moon Bay. He had been there only a few months before, soaking up the last few days of freedom before entering the corporate jungle. Doug guessed that 'jungle' wasn't really the word. This job was way more than he ever could have hoped for. He was an investment banking trainee with Prichart, Molin & Weaver,

LLC. He was making six figures, fresh out of business school, and he was already starting to feel like he had some clout.

If this was the jungle, at least Doug was a lion cub, which he figured was better than being a rabbit.

Doug almost got lost in the photo again when a head popped up over the cubicle wall. It was Richard, another trainee he worked with. The both of them and 4 other new MBAs were in their third month of the company's Leadership Training Program. PMW was considered a boutique investment-banking firm, but boutique was really the wrong word. The firm had nearly 2,500 employees scattered in 60 cities around the world. It was still privately owned at the time, but was looking for either a merger or an IPO, what they called an exit strategy.

Rich had graduated the previous May with an MBA from Stanford, like Doug. They were now in their third month in the program, and were starting to settle into the job. The other trainees included a couple guys were from Harvard, and there was a woman from Wharton and a woman from Cambridge. They had all gotten to know each other pretty well, but had also started to develop their own cliques. Richard and Doug were getting along well.

"Well, what's tonight? Axis? Jillian's?" asked Richard.

"Dude. Lunch," Doug reminded him. "Take one thing at a time, Rich."

"Okay," he said, "Lunch. How about the Hovel?"

“For lunch?” Doug thought that the Hermit’s Hovel was a weird choice for lunch. It was usually a late-night after-party snack joint for the whole crew. “Alright, what the hell. Now?”

“It’s almost two, Doug,” cautioned Richard. Richard Garrison had grown up without the luxuries that the rest of the trainees had always known. He was older than most of them. He had spent some time between undergraduate school at Chicago and his time at Stanford in the corporate world, and even opened his own business. He had in incredible instinct for finding bullshit, and as a result was the best negotiator in the group. Some of the partners had started to bring him into deal meetings to sniff out the angle. He was no diplomat, but his forthrightness had become a welcome trait with the partners.

“Well, let’s go!” Doug said as he stood up. At that moment another head popped up from a nearby cubicle.

“Let’s go where?” asked another trainee, Vanessa Harman. She wasn’t really asking, since she reached for her coat as she said it. She was an MBA from Cambridge. She had that accent that sounds incredibly sexy to American ears, but also sounds smart and distant enough to let you know you would be out of your league if you pursued her. She had the wits to match her voice, and she was obviously the most intuitive in the group.

“The Hovel has a special today,” Said Vanessa. “Taco salad. That’s what he’s looking for.” She pointed at Richard and headed for the door.

A few other heads popped up from the other cubes. Nobody else was coming along, but the ribbing for heading out was about to start.

“Liquid lunch? A little early, huh?” said one younger partner.

Rich was pretty quick on the draw, just like a lot of the older guys. “Hey, eat before you’re hungry,” he hollered, walking backward toward the reception area.

“Drink before you’re thirsty,” came a voice from a far cube.

“Sleep before you’re tired,” yelled another.

“Laugh before you’re happy!” was heard, followed by some laughter, as Doug, Rich, and Vanessa went through the door to the elevators. They were on the 14th floor of the John Hancock Tower in Boston’s Back Bay, adjacent to Copley Square. The tower was Boston’s tallest, and looked something like a bluish glass monolith. It was designed by a famous architect, and featured angles that referred to Boston’s original landscape. From what Doug could tell, it was Boston’s only modern-looking building, and he was glad to work in it.

They rode the elevator down to the lobby, which was a cavernous glass-walled atrium, and stepped through the revolving doors onto the sidewalk. The breeze was cooler than Doug expected. Some days were still warm, with 70-degree temperatures and no breeze. But other days were clearly fall, with brisk winds and grey light. These days were becoming more prevalent, and this day was one of them.

Vanessa pulled her coat together at the neck and looked at Doug and Rich. “So are you going to the party?” she asked.

Doug looked at her, and then at Rich, in confusion. He suspected that Vanessa was talking about the announcement. Rich answered her, “Of course. You need to see and be seen.”

“Well, what do you think they’re going to announce?” Vanessa asked as she looked down at the curb. It had rained a few days before, and the trace of a puddle was still left in the gutter. They stepped over it.

“Oh, who knows?” said Rich. “Something big, though. This is the first time they’ve done this since we’ve been here.”

Doug realized everything he needed to know about the announcement now, and he decided to get a word in. “We’ve only been here for a few months, so if they do this once per quarter-“

“But it could be once a year,” said Vanessa.

“Or never,” said Rich. “The reason I think it’s a big deal is that it’s only three weeks from now. Any quarterly party would be known well in advance.”

Doug did not hear that part of the announcement. It was essential information. If the party were booked already, office gossip would have gotten the word around long before now. If it were only three weeks away, it would be more expensive to book a room. Only great news would warrant the expense.

“Maybe they got the IPO deal,” mused Vanessa.

“Or a merger,” followed Rich. He had been to some of the meetings, as a scribe. He knew a little more about the plans than the other two did.

“What kind of merger?” Doug asked. “Do you know who the players are?”

“I’m probably not supposed to say anything,” Rich smiled. He had every intention of telling them.

“C’mon!” they both pleaded. Doug tried to act indifferent even as he said it.

Doug, Rich, and Vanessa stepped out into the road as the light changed, and a line of cars started toward them, honking. They picked up the pace only a little, letting the cars wait. Drivers in Boston are known for their impatience, but they have good reason; people like the three trainees. Pedestrians in Boston are notorious for their boldness. Being a city of students, couriers, and high-fliers, and a small place that can be traversed by foot in one hour, Boston was a walker’s paradise. Doug knew that if anybody tried walking in traffic with abandon in California, they’d be ticketed for jaywalking. In New York, they’d be run down by cabs.

“Well, the IPO is out. I know that,” said Rich. “The merger could be a New York company or a big Asian firm. I don’t know which one, or much more of the details.”

“Who in New York?” Doug asked. “JP Morgan? Goldman?”

“What about our options?” asked Vanessa.

“They’ll get converted if the buyer is public.” Doug answered. “But they’ll be bigger. That’s good.”

“What about the culture? I kind of like the way things are,” Vanessa mentioned.

Rich could tell that the other two were just about to barrage him with questions he could not answer. He held up his hands as they reached the far sidewalk. “Guys,” he said. “I really have no idea who or what, or when. I know barely more than you do.”

The three reached the curb without looking back to see what the cars were doing. There were, no doubt, some angry faces behind the wheels. A lot of pedestrians crossed the street with abandon, like they had done. It tended to drive the drivers crazy, and it was common to receive a holler or a fully extended middle finger. The trainees had learned to ignore it.

“They got the Constitution Room, y’know,” said Rich. Doug got the impression he was going to issue little tidbits like this all day.

“That means they expect everyone,” said Vanessa. There were more than 750 people in the Boston office.

“Pretty big room,” Doug said as they crossed the sidewalk and followed a marble path, “and pretty nice.”

Copley Square was a large plaza that took up two city blocks. At one end was Trinity Church, which looked much older than it could have been. The plaza was starting to look ragged in the October bustle. A few scraps of litter blew

around, and the leaves were almost completely yellow, and had started to fall.

Doug had heard that in the winter the flat expanse of marble pavement and lawn was supposed to be a forbidding windblown wasteland.

During the waning summer, however, there was still activity, as college students flooded into the area, and workers got outside to enjoy the last few days of tolerable warmth. There was street theater going on, people eating, reading, using laptops, and a few political protesters standing around adding nothing to the world.

“What the hell is that?” asked Vanessa. She nodded ahead toward an object standing a few yards away. It was a knight. They neared it.

“It’s a full-size suit of armor,” said Rich.

“Looks like a vintage model, too.” Doug kidded.

Rich wasted no time in joining in. “I’d say ’56, or ’57. Look at the tailfins.”

“No, ’58. The grille gives it away.” Doug said as he pointed at the visor on the helmet.

“What, 1358?” asked Vanessa. She was getting better at keeping up with this kind of bullshitting.

Standing in the middle of the plaza was a full-size suit of medieval armor. It stood near the fountain, with a sword in a sheath, and it also held a lance. They read the plaque that was standing next to it.

Doug took a look around questioningly. People were walking nearby, but nobody stopped to read the plaque with them.

It read, “This is a life-size model of a European soldier’s battle armor from the 14th century. It is a replica of an actual piece that today stands in the Royal Museum of Antiquities in London, England.”

“Not bad with the date, Van,” Doug said. Rich agreed.

He wondered what the armor was doing standing in the middle of the plaza, but not aloud. There was no need to voice the question, since the other two were certain to be thinking the same thing. It had a curious indentation on its chestplate, a kind of grid. It was round with 9 squares, and showed a different symbol in each square.

“Can you figure these out?” Doug asked.

Vanessa had some experience with hieroglyphics. She took some archeology courses in London before turning to computer science, and then business.

“They’re not really that hard,” she said. “Look, they’re just pictures, not runes or anything.” She pointed out the tree, a balance, and an arm in the middle.

“Oh, I see it,” said Rich, “and this one’s a scroll.”

They could also make out a cross, and a building that must have been a castle. The three gave up on the other symbols.

“So, food?” asked Rich. They started off again.

Standing around the knight started to feel a little weird, since they were not the types who were fascinated by antiques. They were always talking about the newest items available. Rich had shown off his new platinum watch just a week before. Vanessa’s new laptop was about the smallest that Doug had ever seen, and had a built-in touchpanel and wireless card.

Doug was usually fascinated with cars, like the one he’d dreamed about. If he could draw it, it would give some auto engineers a hell of an idea.

The three realized that their detour to the knight had drawn their path closer to the protesters than they wanted. Too close. Just as they were about 10 yards away, the protesters spoke.

“Hey, guys. Are you interested in progress?” asked one of them.

Doug, Rich, and Vanessa did not look, but tried to keep walking.

“Interested in the Free-Market?” asked another one. Vanessa waved at them, and one of them started walking over. Rich and Doug silently groaned.

“I thought you guys looked like good capitalists,” said the girl who came over to them. They stopped. Doug looked sideways at Rich, who wore a similar petulant expression on his face.

The other protesters were engaged in handing out flyers to passers-by, but a couple of them dripped away and came to join their colleague.

“Is there some politician campaigning or something?” asked Vanessa. Doug had never brought up politics with them, or anybody else in the office. It was supposed to be one of those taboo subjects. If they were about to talk about politics, he really would rather have kept walking.

“No,” said the girl. “We’re out to talk about creating a better economy and creating jobs.”

“Economic growth is always worth a campaign,” said one of the others.

Doug leaned over to Rich and muttered something about going on ahead to get a table.

Vanessa noticed the other two. “Oh. I’m sorry,” said Vanessa to the protesters. “We were just on our way to lunch, and-“

“Oh, that’s okay,” said the protester. “Will you take one of our flyers.” She held one out, and Doug was the one to take it.

Rich was visibly impatient now. “Will you guys get a life?” He said. Doug almost laughed out loud. Vanessa turned and walked away. She seemed embarrassed.

The protesters looked at the three for a moment and turned away to start their spiel over again with some hapless tourists.

Doug had never asked the other trainees about politics. He had worked for a couple of campaigns back in California, but neither amounted to a win. California was a tough place to

be a Republican. So was Massachusetts, which was one reason he kept quiet.

If Doug’s co-workers knew he had been involved with some campaigns, he was sure they would never let him live it down, not so much for losing, but for being involved in the first place. He genuinely never wondered which way they went.

He flipped through what the protesters called a flyer. It was not really a flyer, because it was about 28 pages long. It was in small type, and was difficult to read even for Doug. There were theories and equations. A few graphs. The general gist was that tax cuts and deregulation could spur economic growth. Investment led to innovation and jobs. Government was inefficient, etc. Doug was surprised to find that he was mostly in line with the theories. Still, he said nothing to the others. He closed the booklet and put it in his back pocket.

They were walking toward a small store when Rich announced, “Hold on, I’ve got to pick some stuff up.” The three veered from the middle of the sidewalk and headed to the entryway of “Kand’s Corner Store”. They came here a lot.

This was not a typical little convenience store. Doug knew of no other “Kand’s Corner” anywhere else. The store was decorated with much higher class than the bright, white chain stores. The walls were paneled in dark wood. The shelves were stocked with colorful cans and boxes of upscale food and novelty items. There were some gift items, as well as fresh fruits. There was often a shelf or two for locally-made items,

like candles and brownies. There were also some imports, and a door in the rear led to a wine cellar.

One wall was lined with a counter, on which were displayed bulk candies, lottery tickets, and chintz items like Hacky Sacks and gnome pens. Part of the counter was used for the two old-fashioned cash registers. Today, some boxes sat open on the counter, half-full of Koosh balls. The boxes were sent from Singapore.

“Hello, guys. Can I help you?” asked Kand himself, standing up from behind the counter. He was tall, thin and dark-skinned. He had obviously been unpacking boxes, because his sleeves were rolled up, and his shirt was unbuttoned to the fourth button, exposing a leather necklace and pendant. Doug knew that his full name was Kandreshi Srinisvar-something, probably Indian, he guessed.

“Sure. Do you have the Watermans in yet?” responded Rich. He had come in here because Kand could usually get his hand on some costly items, for dirt cheap. The stuff was real. Rich had apparently enlisted him to acquire a collection of Waterman pens. How he did it, Doug did not care.

“Oh, sorry. Not yet. I have been told the goods are in transit,” Kand said, nodding. He always came through, so Rich was very patient.

“No problem,” he said. “I’ll try again next week?”

“Of course. Next week will be better,” answered Kand.

Rich picked up a handful of wrapped candies, and put them on the counter. He pulled out his wallet and said, “I’ll get these.”

“On the house,” said Kand. “I apologize for the pens. They will be here.”

Rich grinned and pocketed the candies. Just as before turning to leave, he stopped in his tracks. He had noticed Kand’s pendant, and now Doug and Vanessa did, too. It was the same symbol they saw on the suit of armor. It was only an inch across, but it was segmented and included icons in each square.

Kand looked down at it and said, “Oh, this is a family heirloom. My mother gave it to me before I came here.”

“Is it rare?” asked Rich.

Kand said, “Oh, no. But there aren’t many in this country. I think of it as a map. It is my past directing my future.”

“Wow. I like it. That’s a little deep for me,” said Rich. Kand bowed slightly. The trainees waved and pushed the door open.

“See you later,” said Kand, smiling.

They continued to the restaurant. It was a little sidewalk bistro, with tables and booths inside by the bar, and wrought-iron tables and chairs out on the sidewalk. The restaurant doubled as a hotspot at night, featuring valet parking and velvet ropes. Doug, Rich, and Vanessa were not on the list yet, but

they were hanging out there at least once a week, and were gaining ground.

One of the waitresses saw them and waved. The greeter looked up from the people she was busy with and nodded. She had been about to lead them to the last outside table. Doug saw her pause, look inside, and ask her customers if they would mind being indoors.

Within a minute, she had led them to an inside table and came back to greet the trainees.

“A daytime visit?” she asked.

“Yep. Lead on,” said Rich. She took the three to the table they had already had their eyes on. She laid the menus on the table as the three sat down.

By day, the restaurant was an upscale deli-style bistro that sold thick deli sandwiches on baguettes with shaved imported meats, romaine lettuce and house dressings. The sandwich plates ran about \$14.95 and included homemade pickles and a colorful blend of sea-salted vegetable chips.

The waitress approached, “Hi guys!” she hollered cheerfully. “Drinks first? Any appetizers today?”

Vanessa ordered a ginger ale, Doug ordered a Pepsi, and Rich asked for a tomato juice. They got a platter of stuffed spinach dumplings for appetizers.

The protesters apparently needed to eat, too, because the four of them were sitting nearby talking in hushed voices. They had only drinks in front of them.

Rich looked at them without remorse. This would be an uncomfortable situation for most people, but Rich thrived on discomfort.

A few minutes passed, and the trainees got their drinks and ordered their sandwiches. The protesters finally decided to engage in conversation. One of them had a long, almost gaunt face. He seemed to be the leader, though he was not the oldest. His shaven face could not hide the fact that he was obviously destined to be a bearded economics professor.

“Hello again,” said the long-faced protester. “You can see we’re getting lives,” he said as he pointed to the drinks.

He seemed determined to show that he was Rich’s cerebral equal. He wasn’t.

“Drinks are a good start,” responded Rich. He was only half-interested in talking to these guys. The other protesters appeared nervous.

“Have you read the flyer?” asked the protester.

“I have not,” said Rich, after taking a sip of his tomato juice. “I wonder if you have.”

“Suppose you could tell me the basic economic construct found in it?” asked the protester.

“You mean the one where those of us with jobs and businesses go to work and pay for those of you who don’t?”

“And how do you pay for us?” asked the protester.

“Well, where do I begin?” said Rich. Vanessa and Doug watched the master drawing in his prey.

“Start with this meal,” answered the protester.

“Fine. I pay for my meal, which costs me \$15 for the lunch, \$3 for the drink, \$12 for the appetizer, \$2 for tax, all of which goes to help this place stay open, and which they use to pay rent, salaries, insurance, supplies, food, taxes, and then I tip this young lady here,” he said just as the waitress arrived to place our spinach dumplings on the table. “Thank you,” he said with a grin, then continued, “which is well spent in return for her phenomenal service. The total is about \$40, which I am happy to pay, even knowing that I am subsidizing your cheap ass, sitting there taking up a table just to buy a soda.”

The protester did not blink. “The math is correct,” he said, “but I was talking about the concept.” Perhaps he carried more than righteous indignation between his ears.

“What I meant was,” he started, “is that your job, where you are obviously in banking, I can tell by the tie, and your bank accounts, investments, and credit spending all generate profits for investors, who in turn use their earnings to support other speculators, like the importers who sell meat and cheese to small restaurants, the entrepreneurs who own them, the contractors who build them, and the decorators who furnish them, using items like these chairs and tables, which are imported from overseas. So every dime you spend here does help this place stay open, but it also enriches the people who support it on so many different levels.”

“I’m glad you find it fascinating,” said Rich. “To me it’s just numbers. Nothing deep.”

“But it is deep,” said the protester. “The basic economic construct is a circular system, where you are merely a cog in the wheel, enabling the very wealthy to create jobs and support businesses, and keep the whole thing going.” He was beginning to ramble, Doug could tell.

“This is what economic talk sounds like coming from an amateur,” said Rich, smiling. “The truth is much simpler. I sell, I eat. I don’t, I starve. It’s the same for everyone here, including the waitresses.” The waitress came by as if on cue, and asked how everything was. “These are really good dumplings, by the way,” Rich told her.

“So you’re not selling me,” he said to the protester.

“There’s no need to sell to you. You’ve already bought in,” said the protester. “The system has been set up to include you, and you’re playing along beautifully.”

“So what are you guys, against economics or something?” asked Vanessa.

“Not at all. We are simply here to educate people. And it’s easy because we ‘sell’ an idea that is already popular; Earn more, spend more, keep up with the Joneses, and it will all work out.”

“Sounds good to me,” Doug said as the sandwiches arrived.

“Alright, what’s your deal?” asked Rich.

“We are members of The Army of the Free Majority. It’s a group that supports Globalization, the name of today’s basic economic construct.”

“What are you guys, students or something?” Doug asked.

“Yeah, my name is Eric. I’m at MIT, these guys are from MIT and Harvard. I’m a CS major, but we’re mostly Econ, except maybe you,” he said as he turned toward one of the others, a pretty blonde girl. “Beth, you’re Philosophy, right?” Beth nodded.

“I was CS in undergrad,” said Vanessa.

Doug pulled out the flyer and said, “I looked at some of this. You guys don’t seem like a bunch of commies.”

“No, not at all. We’re not trying to be political, but it’s not easy. Economic ideas that support Globalization are only coming from the right these days.”

Rich laughed and reached for the flyer. “Give me that!” he demanded. Doug gave it to him and he and Vanessa started flipping through it.

“I’m on the right.” Doug said, and he did not think Vanessa and Rich noticed, as they flipped through the flyer.

“Some of this is pretty heavy social engineering,” Rich said. From what Doug had seen, the flyer included several ideas about engineering the economy. Most political organizations judged this kind of effort with disdain, though it was exactly what most of them did as well.

Vanessa noticed something, too. “Who’s this guy?” she asked. Rich turned over the booklet so the Free Majority people could see it. He pointed at a photo of some old guy making a speech.

“That’s Dr. Reginald Currier. He’s sort of the father of our group,” said Eric.

“His podium says ‘Currier for President’ on it,” said Rich. He was still on the verge of laughing.

“He has run in every election going back thirty years,” said Eric.

“I can see why he hasn’t won,” said Rich. “This shit’s pretty exhaustive.”

“The truth can be complex,” said Eric.

“Yeah, but complex doesn’t work,” said Vanessa. She had given up on the flyer and began picking at her sandwich.

Rich was still flipping through it. “Have you been living in a box or something?” he said. “If it doesn’t fit on a bumper sticker, it dies.”

Eric nodded, “This is true, but people can’t live on stickers. Globalization is much bigger, and it affects everyone, even you guys.”

“As long as it affects us well, I’m all for it,” said Rich, grinning as he looked at his polished watch. Doug smirked and began to dig into his sandwich.

Eric saw his opening, and took it. “Well, the root cause of our prosperity in America today, indeed, the world, is Globalization-”

“Did you say indeed?” Rich interrupted. The waitress brought the protesters their check.

Eric looked up at her but barely paused. “It is the inevitable outcome of expanding communications and trade. It

builds office buildings and suburbs in the USA, and enriches villages in Brazil. Inventors innovate, and companies conglomerate to improve productivity, and create the jobs of tomorrow. It diminishes poverty, increases upward mobility, and allows more consumers to buy luxury goods. It is the root message behind advertisements to escape to Aruba, mortgage our homes, invest in Wall Street, to buy Pepsi, to open businesses, to pick ourselves up by the bootstraps, to reach for the brass ring, and to never stop trying. It has other names, such as “The American Dream”, “New World Order”, “The New Economy”, and “The Ownership Society”. It is gilded in silver. It is Here. It is Now. It is Cool, Groovy, Rad, and Da Bomb all rolled into one. With Globalization, everybody can be a player, everybody can be a winner. Everybody.”

“I’m sorry, I missed all of that,” kidded Rich. “Could you start over?”

“Just needs some patriotic music,” Vanessa added.

Doug laughed almost silently, his mouth stuffed with his sandwich. He realized he had been a willing participant in Globalization, and he didn’t think he had any regrets about it.

“So you talked about educating people. Are you trying to get people to support Globalization?” Doug asked.

Rich followed, “Good question. If it’s here, it’s now, and all that, where’s the need to support it?”

Eric went quiet, then said, “Oh, there are forces that will try, and there is a plot right now to stop Globalization. You saw what happened in Seattle a few years ago.”

“You mean the riots?” Doug asked.

“Socialist anti-globalization groups caused that, but that was amateur hour compared to where they are today. They are much more organized,” said Eric. “Now they have the power to bring down the engine that drives it. All of our livelihoods are based on it. The stock market.”

Rich and Vanessa were listening with mock interest. “What are they going to do, blow up Wall Street?” she asked.

The long-faced man said nothing. Doug raised his eyebrows, and he saw the other two blanch slightly.

“Seriously?” he asked.

“I should not say any more,” the long-faced man said, then looked at Doug. “We are holding a seminar in a few weeks. We need people, and we will explain what we are doing in greater detail.” He handed Doug an invitation.

“Thanks,” Doug said as he placed the flyer on the table. The Free Majority people got up and paid for their drinks, and soon left. The trainees were silent as they ate.

Doug’s co-workers looked at him like he had “loser” written across his face and did not know it. Rich paused between bites and flipped through the flyer. “This sounds like a bad sci-fi movie,” he said, “the kind with explosions and knights-”

“and Bruce Boxleitner,” said Vanessa. They all laughed and changed the subject.

The three walked back to the office in relative silence. They had used up over an hour. There was no time clock at the

firm, and no retribution as long as the work got done. Only good-natured ribbing from the Vice Presidents and the other trainees acted as a deterrent to lateness. When arriving after 7:30 AM, the cubicles would resonate with a chorus of “You’re Late!”, and “Slacker!” When leaving before 6:00 PM, a few co-workers would cry out, “Hey! Where ya goin’, part-timer?” This kept the rookies in line.

The office was a lot more casual than Doug thought an investment bank would be. As trainees, they were expected to dress well, but were not the ones usually called upon to meet with potential clients. They made a lot of calls, and were expected to behave professionally when on the phone, but at other times they were to research deals. The trainees were the ones to find out everything they could about clients and other bankers. What business were they in? What was their bankroll? How did they make their money? What kind of cars did they own? Were they married? Children? Pets? Mistresses?

Most of the time there was a professional atmosphere in the building, but when the senior partners were out on deal meetings, which was often, the culture around the office was more like a frat house. The VPs worked hard, but took practically nothing seriously. Every client had a nickname, often lewd. Deals that went south caused a round of loud swearing, but the mood could change in seconds. A partner would finish spouting off about a client, and immediately sweet-talk that person on the phone.

The Vice Presidents and Junior Partners treated the trainees like their personal lackeys. They often called for them with a paper airplane to the forehead. They took turns giving them some menial or impossible tasks that went beyond running for coffee. The trainees were called upon to replace the water bottles in the coolers, and one of the junior partners would have cut pinholes in the neck so it would explode all over the floor. They were expected to stay overnight to crunch numbers on deals that would change the next day, and stay to crunch the numbers again. They built hundreds of paper airplanes for the partners to fling at them. They were expected to buy the drinks whenever there was something to celebrate, which was often, since the partners would celebrate everything from a deal to a divorce.

Because of the partners and their constant celebrating, the trainees were quickly learning where the nightlife was in Boston. The town has a surprising amount of it for such a small place. Rich and Doug both lived in the city, so they often took advantage of the clubs in the Fenway district and the Waterfront. Doug had found plenty of alleys and back streets with some good clubs and bars. They even found a place to drink beer, eat pizza, and play PC video games.

Vanessa lived outside the city, so she was not around quite as often outside of work. She had done her homework, though, and she was a great source of information about how to get around and where to get a \$2 brew or the best spicy fries. Though the hours were long and the culture was fast-paced, the

pay was very much worth it. They were getting \$120,000 per year, and the bonus program included quarterly fees based on performance, and stock options if the company ever went public. Not only that, but the trainees were determined to show it off to everyone they met. Rich's watch had already been used to impress a few ladies he and Doug would meet at the clubs.

Working for PMW was turning out to be a really good deal for Doug. He liked the people and the location. He liked living in Boston. He was something of a local himself, being from Maine. Despite 7 years in California, he still had traces of the Maine accent. Doug usually used his R's, but the accent really popped out one evening during his first week, while the trainees were playing Wiffle ball in the office using rolled up spreadsheets for a bat. He coiled up the paper roll and wound up to swing, yelling, "I'll pahk it outta heah!" The whole office broke down laughing. Most of the others were not New England natives, so to them it sounded foreign.

Because of the proximity to his family, PMW was one firm that Doug really wanted to get the call from. He was actually in the middle of a golf game at Half Moon Bay when he got the call from Todd Molin, one of the Senior Partners. He congratulated Doug and told him that he was one of the candidates selected for the program. This made Doug feel like a real high-flyer. His college buds bought a bottle of champagne at the clubhouse, and they toasted to cheers from everyone in the room.

The management-training program included three 8-month rotations; one in Boston HQ, one in the Asian HQ in Hong Kong, and one in Argentina. Besides Rich and Vanessa, there were three other trainees. There were the Harvard guys, Brey, the partier, and Stephen, a tall silver-spoon type, and the Wharton girl was named Karen.

Though Brey was kind of unserious, he walked around with a superior attitude most of the time. He was southern, and was an heir to the Coca-Cola fortune. His family had founded the company. Stephen was quieter and more refined than the rest, and always tried to act as everybody's friend. It was clear that he was a hanger-on to Brey since they started at Harvard. Karen kept to herself. When she did appear out of her cube, she was a little grating to be around, though she was very smart. She was fine as long as she did the work and kept quiet.

The trainees were to be together for the duration, and then, depending on performance, they would be sent on a partnership track or would be given the directive to pursue 'other opportunities'. It was either Lexuses and South Beach Condos, or selling tires in Decatur. It was only their 3rd month in the program, and they were green, but they were driven.

Rich, Vanessa and Doug got back to their cubes and started to get back to work. Rich was working with another trainee on a project, and Vanessa was doing something that allowed her to put her headphones on and disappear into the screens for the afternoon.

Doug sat down and looked around his cubicle. His screens had gone black, until he hit the space bar, which turned them all on. There were 6 screens set up on a stand, tightly packed together. There was the mail screen, and the one with the photo of Half Moon Bay. On the others, spreadsheets and graphs shimmered in the fluorescent light. Numbers and arrows flickered past on the bottom of one of the screens. Some were green, some were red. Actually, most were red.

Doug's current project involved paying attention to the news, and identifying opportunities for the Junior Partners to investigate. He turned on a local news stream on one of the screens, and saw a report on the display of antiques that was currently going on in Boston.

All over the city for the next couple weeks, there would be phony medieval artifacts displayed on sidewalks and in common areas like parks and malls. They were duplicates of actual rare and expensive items, and were being well cared for and removed during the night. Each day, they were back again, standing in the open air. It was like the city was being used as a chintz museum. The media reporters were generally agog over it, though there were some detractors who detested the displays and called them litter. The whole display was going to be taken to New York in a couple of weeks, either way.

Doug looked up at his own museum, consisting of the items he had accumulated on his cube walls. After only a few months in the program, he had managed to make the place his own.

A hockey calendar hung on one wall. He had played for the hockey team at Stanford as a business undergrad. Next to the calendar was a poster of a whitewater kayaker going over a waterfall. He was not the whitewater kayaker, but the waterfall was in California. It was on the Feather River, and was one of the waterfalls in the Seven Teacups section, a popular hair-boater run. A hair-boater is an advanced paddler with years of experience and tons of cojones. They run rivers up to class 5 and harder, and are looked up to by others like Doug. He was good, but not crazy.

He had a shelf in the cubicle with a lot of banking and finance books, and some project folders. Next to them were some golf balls, and a tee in a little plastic box.

The investment banking culture started to grow on him. The trainees showed off their new gear every day, partied every weekend, and immersed themselves in the fraternity-like culture. They learned to work hard, play harder, swear like truckers, and treat most other people like shit.

This was flying high, and Doug felt like a brilliant career was just beginning.