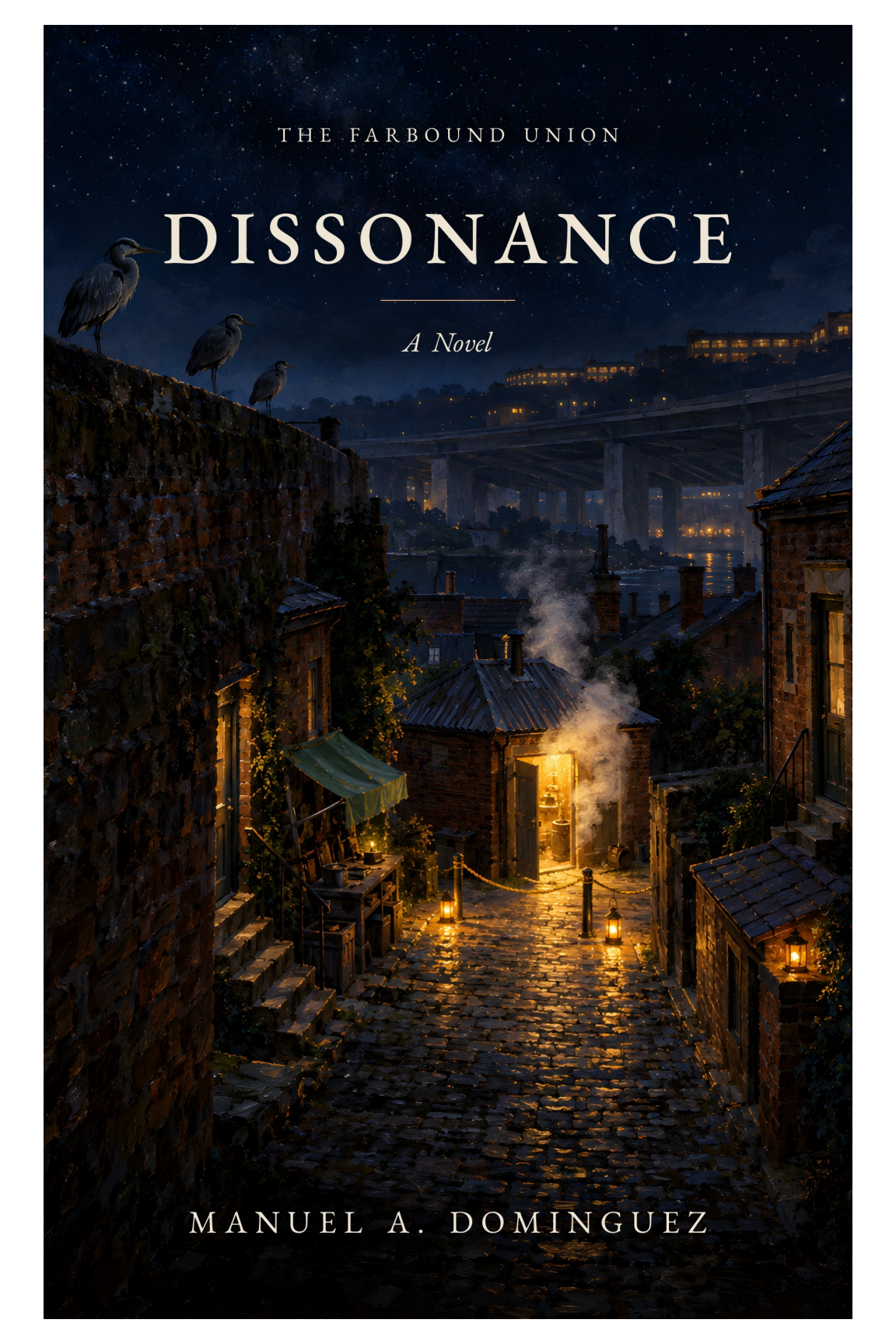




THE FARBOUND UNION

DISSONANCE

A Novel

MANUEL A. DOMINGUEZ

DISSONANCE

Chapter 1 Sample

Manuel A. Dominguez

2026

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Copyright

DISSONANCE

A Farbound Union novel

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, organizations and events are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is coincidental. The city in this book begins from a real place; its future history is invented.

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This book and its cover were developed with generative AI tools under the author's direction. See Research and Fiction at the back of the book.

A Note on the Languages

The people of the Mud speak Kanal, and in this book they speak it on the page. You do not need to learn it. The narration carries what matters, and most lines explain themselves in the moment.

When someone changes into the Canopy's standard English, to an official, a Counter clerk, the staff at Third Sump or the Board, the line appears in English. That change is the switch: the language a Mud speaker reaches for when the other side of the counter is listening. Writing is in the standard too, so notices, forms, ledgers and letters appear in English, in italics when they are quoted.

The older languages of the wards, among them Spanish, Vietnamese, Haitian Kreyòl, Korean and Louisiana French, are told in the narration.

Many chapters open with a line in italics that names whose telling the chapter comes from.

At the back of the book: People, Places and Institutions, Reading the Languages and a Glossary of every Kanal word spoken in the story.

Sample note: The reference sections named above are included in the full book.

1. Records One Fatality



The Board's notice, as pasted on the Sabine Row relay cabinet; Janelle Mouton's telling; Ozanne Dufresne's, in part.

On the morning of the third day after the storm, the Board's notice went up.

Janelle saw it first, because it went up on the steel door of the Sabine Row relay cabinet across the lane from her bench, where the Drain and the Watch put everything they wanted the row to read. Two Purifiers pasted it with brushes from a bucket at the seventh bell and went on to the next cabinet. It was printed on good paper, the Canopy's heavy white, with the Board's seal at the top and the Drain's mark and the Watch's below it. By the time she had crossed the lane there were a dozen people in front of it, and Ozanne, climbing up out of the pit with the log on its cord, stood at the back of them reading over their heads.

NOTICE OF THE BOARD

Concerning the service interruption at the Cistern Row pump station, Ward 7, on the night of the recent storm.

The Board regrets the interruption of drainage service at the Cistern Row station and the resulting inundation of residences, and records one fatality.

Preliminary review by the Drain and the Watch attributes the interruption to unlicensed interference with network-timed infrastructure in Ward 7 during the storm, including:

1. unregistered damping materials fitted without permit to Drain machinery at the Sabine Row station and distributed to Drain crews in the ward;

2. unauthorized operating instructions circulated to Drain crews by persons associated with the organization known as Rose's Thorn;
3. an unregistered medical intervention performed within a Consortium care facility on the night in question, the effects of which on network timing are under review.

The Board will restore full network operation to all Ward 7 stations. Persons with information concerning the above are directed to the ward office. Drain crews are reminded that manual operation of network-timed machinery is prohibited.

The row read it in silence. Then Hortense Picou, who had come off the night shift with her hands wrapped in rag, said, very clearly, "Sabine te e la sèl ra te deme sek," and a man at the back said, "Poutet sa le pa amu li," and somebody laughed, not well. Sabine had been the only row to stay dry. That, the man meant, was why the Board did not like it.

Janelle read item one three times. *Unregistered damping materials.* Tire rubber and cork and her brother's offcuts, three layers glued and stitched on a bench with a notch in its front edge. Distributed to Drain crews in the ward. It did not say her name. It did not need to. Everybody reading it knew whose bench was across the lane from the cabinet, and so did the Purifiers who had pasted it, and so did whoever had written it.

"Le te meta tu su miray," Babette said beside her, low. They had put her on a wall.

"Le te meta la pad ye su miray." The pads, Janelle said. Not her.

"Mem miray." Same wall.

Ozanne came round the edge of the crowd and stood next to them. She had a smear of grease pencil on her cheek and circles under her eyes like bruises. "Numero tres," Ozanne said, so quietly that only Janelle could hear. "La nuit so." She did not look at the notice. "Kekchoz te pasa na tiyo la nuit so. Vè onse. Mo te havi men di mo su li." Something had gone through the pipe that night, around eleven, and her hand had been on it. She stopped. She would not say what, and did not know what. "Mo te havi men di mo su li. Sa selman." That was all.

Janelle looked at her. Ozanne looked back and then away, down the lane toward Cistern Row.

Vessa was coming up the lane from Cistern Row with a folder under her arm and mud to the knee. She walked through the crowd, which let her through, and stood in front of the notice and read it, all of it, slowly, the way Janelle had seen her read hymn numbers on the board at St. Brigid's, moving her lips. When she had finished she stood a moment longer.

Then she took a stub of chalk out of her pocket, the fat limestone kind the stationer on the Commons cut for the Mourning Walk, and reached up, and on the steel door of the cabinet, beside *records one fatality*, in the round careful schoolroom hand of a woman who had been made to copy her letters over and over and had never forgotten how, she wrote:

Wendell Ancelet. 88. Cistern Row. He said the pump was running.

She put the chalk back in her pocket.

"Le ve lava li," somebody said. They would wash it off.

"Ko mo gon vena baka," Vessa said. Then she would come back. She went on up the row toward the ward office with her folder, to ask Asante where the association meant to put him, since the Cistern Friends' shelves had been full since the fever year and the Counter's common shelf was the only one with room.

* * *

From Vessa's telling; Teodor Asante's counter log; the Counter's interment card, which misspells the name.

At the ward office on Toulouse Street at nine on the third morning, Teodor Asante listened to Vessa with his hands flat on the counter, and then got up and fetched the Cistern Friends' shelf roll from the cabinet himself, because he wanted her to see that he had looked.

The Friends had nine shelves in their tomb behind the Cistern Row chapel. All nine had been full since the fever year, and the waiting list for the freed ones ran two pages, in three different hands. Wendell Ancelet's name was not on the list. His dues stood three quarters behind, and had since the quarter after his wife's year and a day ran out

and her bones went to the back. Under the Friends' rules a member three quarters behind had no claim to a shelf.

"Ko sa e la vout komin," Vessa said. Then it was the common vault.

"Sa e la vout komin." Teodor took down the Counter's card. *Dignified Interment, Unaffiliated Resident. Fee payable at collection: twelve tokens. The Counter provides a shelf, a card and transport. Consolidation after a year and a day.* "Mo pu ranpli fom po un dispans," he said. A waiver took six weeks. "Seis semen."

"Li e su un dora na palye di Broussard ye depi dos jou an mita," Vessa said. "Na chale sa." He had lain on a door on the Broussards' landing for two and a half days, in this heat. The Thorn had brought ice twice, and the Broussards had sent the children to cousins. "Seis semen."

Teodor wrote *waiver requested* in his counter log anyway, and the time. Then he reached into his own pocket and put two tokens on the counter, and did not look at her while he did it, and she took them.

The row made up the rest. Clémence opened the Threshold Circle's tin and counted out four. The Kerrigans found one. Janelle Mouton, whose trade had been drying up since the notch, sent two by Babette. Vessa had three left in her own tin after the Drain's fitter had charged her eight tokens to reconnect her house, and she put in all three. There was another tin under her bed, beside Néri's shoes, with nine years of his wage in it. She did not open it.

The Counter's cart came at four: a flat cart with a canvas cover drawn by two men in gloves and cloth masks, and a clerk walking behind with a card box and a pen on a chain. The clerk was young and tired and polite. He took the twelve tokens and counted them twice and wrote a receipt. He asked for the deceased's registry card.

"It went in the water," Vessa said, in the Counter's English, the gate voice. "It was in his jacket."

"Then I take the name from the Counter's list." He ran a finger down a page in the box and wrote on a white card in a clear hand: *ANCELOT, W. Ward 7. Unaffiliated.* He slid it into the brass frame on the cart's side.

"Ancelet," Vessa said. "E, T. Wendell Ancelet."

"The card is taken from the list, madame."

“La lis pa korek,” Vessa said. The list was wrong. She said it in Kanak, and did not trouble to change it for him.

“Corrections are made by form,” the clerk said, “with the deceased’s registry card attached.” He said it kindly. He had said it before. Vessa, who had filed a form every month for nine years, looked at him and understood that he did not know he had said anything at all.

By then Wendell Ancelet had begun to change. The Thorn’s ice had melted twice through the quilt and the door and dripped down the Broussards’ stair, and the landing smelled sweet and heavy, so that the Broussards tied cloths over their faces to pass it. His belly had swollen under the quilt. His face had darkened and gone slack and puffy, the lips drawn back off his teeth, and where the quilt had slipped there were green marks on the skin of his side. Flies had found the corners of his eyes, though Auguste had sat all morning with a palm-leaf fan. When four of them lifted the door, fluid ran from under the quilt along the wood and down the steps, and Aurélien Broussard turned away and was sick over the railing into the lane, and wiped his mouth, and came back and took his corner again. They carried him down and slid him onto the cart in the quilt, and the men drew the canvas over him. Then the row walked behind the cart up to the Mid Strata slope. Clémence went first in her chair, with Auguste pushing where the lane was broken, and Madame Arsenault behind her in her own chair with her rosary, and Jules on crutches, and after them the rest of Cistern Row in its mud, the Kerrigans and the Broussards and Pip holding Ernestine’s hand. Nessa had come down from Ward 8 with Big Theo and Philomène Ardoin from the Rope Walk Band, and they walked at the back and played the ghost-tree song slowly, at the Ward 7 rate, Philomène’s trumpet low and Nessa singing under it and Big Theo keeping the pulse on the bass horn.

Where the lane turned to the slope and the iron under their feet gave way to the Mid Strata’s damped paving, the stroke fell away. Vessa felt it go out of her soles the way you feel a hand let go. The band lost its time. For a few bars the song went wrong in the quiet, too fast and then too slow, until Big Theo began stamping the pulse on the paving with his right foot, heavy, forty to the minute, and they found it again on his foot.

The common vault was a door cut into the slope below the Toulouse stair, faced in gray stone, with a brass rack beside it holding

forty white cards in rows. The men slid Ancelet onto a shelf inside on a board and came out, and the clerk moved his card from the cart's frame to the rack, bottom row, last place: *ANCELOT, W.* He wrote the shelf number on Vessa's receipt. The whole of it took eleven minutes. The row stood there on the quiet paving for a while after the clerk had gone, because nobody wanted to be the first to walk away.

Vessa sang the last verse with the band. She sang it a quarter tone flat, as she had sung everything for nine years, so that a voice in a dark place, if it ever heard her, would know whose it was. Néri had no shelf and no card and no receipt and no wrong name in a brass rack. She stood in front of Wendell Ancelet's misspelled card and understood that she envied him the card, and was ashamed, and sang anyway.

* * *

The Office of the Mayor's morning bulletin on the second day after the storm, as heard on the Broussards' wireless; Clémence Fortier's note in the margin of her record.

The Office of the Mayor reports that all Ward 7 pump stations performed within service parameters during the recent weather. A residence on Cistern Row experienced water ingress, and the Office extends its sympathy to those inconvenienced. Drainage service has been restored. Reconnection of breakaway utility couplings is available from Drain-licensed fitters at the standard charge. On the Esplanade deck, the Regatta Ball will go ahead as planned, the Canopy Angling Society having confirmed that the weather has cleared. The North Deck extension reports no damage to its finished span. The tone continues on the Mid Strata emitters. Calm is a frequency.

In the margin of the Threshold Circle's record, beside the entry for 00:50, Clémence Fortier wrote in pencil: *A residence. Nine houses floated, fourteen ground floors under, one man dead on a door on this landing while they said it. C.F.*

Research and Fiction

This story begins with a real region. Its future history, characters, institutions and events are invented. Research informs the distinctions the story makes; it does not predict this future or explain its mysteries.

Kanal is a constructed language. It was built from the documented histories of the languages spoken in and around New Orleans and from what linguists know about how contact languages form: tense and aspect words before the verb, words for “say” and “see” becoming markers of how a speaker knows something, and a spoken language living beside a written standard. Its forms are not the speech of any living community. Readers who know Louisiana Creole or Haitian Kreyòl will recognize family resemblances, and should not take Kanal as a representation of either.

Among the works the language drew on: Charles A. Ferguson, “Diglossia” (*Word*, 1959); Thomas L. Willett, “A Cross-Linguistic Survey of the Grammaticization of Evidentiality” (*Studies in Language*, 1988); and the *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures* (APiCS Online).

Robert Greene’s books and Paul Kleinman’s *Philosophy 101* influenced the novel’s questions about power, desire, strategy and meaning. The characters’ choices are their own, not demonstrations that any one account is true.

This book and its cover were developed with generative AI tools under the author’s direction.