Landscape with Invisible Hand
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When the vuvv first landed, it came as a surprise to aspiring artist Adam and the rest of planet Earth—but not necessarily an unwelcome one. Can it really be called an invasion when the vuvv generously offered free advanced technology and cures for every illness imaginable? As it turns out, yes. With his parents’ jobs replaced by alien tech and no money for food, clean water, or the vuvv’s miraculous medicine, Adam and his girlfriend, Chloe, have to get creative to survive. And since the vuvv crave anything they deem “classic” Earth culture (doo-wop music, still-life paintings of fruit, true love), recording 1950s-style dates for the vuvv to watch in a pay-per-minute format seems like a brilliant idea. But it’s hard for Adam and Chloe to sell true love when they hate each other more with every passing episode. Soon enough, Adam must decide how far he’s willing to go—and what he’s willing to sacrifice—to give the vuvv what they want.
Landscape with Invisible Hand is the story of a teen artist just a few years from now, a kid who wants to create environments for video games, but instead finds himself painting scenes of a new America in the wake of alien colonization of Earth. He and his family are just trying to scrape by, since alien tech has taken over most human jobs and there’s no work for anyone except the wealthy. This is the story of his struggle to define himself and his world when everything seems to be in chaos, in free fall. It’s told entirely through descriptions of his landscape paintings and the anecdotes behind them.

As I was writing it, I started to realize it’s about how we all struggle to define ourselves, especially as teens, and especially when social media has turned our own lives into works of art we have to curate. It’s a very different world from the slick, commercialized world of my other futuristic novel, Feed, but there are some similarities. I guess you could say Feed is about being sold to while Landscape with Invisible Hand is about how we now have to sell ourselves. We’re all constantly painting self-portraits and sketches of the world we live in on Facebook, on Instagram, on Snapchat. But we’re also part of a bigger picture, and we often don’t have a choice how we’re depicted there, in the wider clashes of culture and power.

I hope the book will speak to kids who struggle with how to identify themselves at a time when even the most intimate parts of our lives are public art and all of us are trying to be someone, whoever that may be.
There is no full night in our town because the rendering sails of the vuvv stretch high into the air and glow with a dull yellow light. My girlfriend Chloe and I are lying on the grass next to the school gym, watching the sails up in the sky ripple in some invisible electromagnetic tide.

Gazing upward together, we hold hands and I say, “It’s so beautiful.” I think for a minute and then say, “Like your hair. Blowing.”

“Adam,” she says, “that’s a really nice thing to say.”

“Yeah,” I agree, and I tilt my head so it’s leaning on her shoulder. “Gee, Chloe,” I say, and turn to kiss her cheek.

As it happens, Chloe and I hate each other. Still, my head is next to hers, which I would gladly, at this point, twist off with my bare hands.

All of this is seen by hundreds of vuvv, paying per minute.