



Excerpts from "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death"

March 23, 1775

By Patrick Henry

Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the numbers of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation?

Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation; the last arguments to which kings resort. I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry has been so long forging. And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years.

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free--if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending--if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained--we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us! They tell us, sir that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength but irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace--but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

# The Virus

Author: "Bushite Fury"

How in the hell had things gone so bad so quickly, Aaron Winters thought as he listened to the distant gunfire and watched the smoke rising only a few blocks away. Their own neighborhood was silent, he was almost the only person in the entire block, everyone else had left the previous evening and that morning.

Aaron was a former programmer and now a website designer, age 35, happily married with a Wife and two children. 5 years ago they'd finally been able to put a deposit down on their house in a good area, she'd gotten an office job and he worked largely from home, occasionally traveling to other states on contract work. Life was good and looking brighter all the time, until the economic downturn began after the Middle East wars ended. Now, their house was worth cents in the dollar, their savings were almost gone, unemployment was rife.

Crime was the only growth industry.

He'd just returned from shopping before the nightly shooting started. As usual the emergency services didn't respond, the only time they were seen these days was when they cleared the Bodies and Car wrecks from the roads each morning. They never entered the burned buildings; they would have been shot down if they had. After 3pm they disappeared completely and weren't seen again until after dawn the next day. You could forget about receiving help from them if you needed it, you were on your own, they only grudgingly answered calls, and the answer was invariably "we're too busy to attend".

Several months before, he'd gotten his wife Barbara and two Children, Cassandra and William, out of the area to a safe place in the Country, where the Predators never went. He'd only returned to their house to take a few remaining mementos of their previous lives and shop for needed items, constantly on the watch for people hanging around traffic lights, stop signs and doorways whenever he did so.

The ultimate purpose of a Government was to protect its people from Invasion and Attack, and the US Government was deliberately allowing both, he thought as he sat on the balcony of their house for the last time. But in a few hours, all going well, things were going to abruptly change...

The US as it was known was winding down, deluged in a morass of economic and criminal decay, subtly dying a little more each day. The population had been slowly introduced to the changes which were destroying them, exactly like the proverbial Frog in hot water, unaware as the temperature slowly rose around it until it was too late. The same thing had happened all around the World but the population had by and large been inured to the changes and refused to take notice as one nation after another was destroyed, either from within or by invasion as necessary. Large parts of all cities and most suburbs had become absolute no-go areas law abiding citizens steered clear of. Taxes had risen sharply and pushed businesses under, all to pay for foreign wars. In response, President Bush had instituted economic 'reforms' consisting of borrowing like never before, which the country and the entire world were now paying for.

The rot was traceable back for decades, but it had set in proper on Sept 11, 2001. Many unanswered questions remained about that calamity. For instance, what happened with the investigation into the stock market manipulations that made someone hundreds of millions or billions with the resulting market

downturn? The documented pre-Sept 11 insider trading that occurred immediately before the attacks involved highly leveraged bets on blocks of stock that its share price would fall dramatically, and affected only companies hit hard by the attacks. The FBI had never released the results of that probe. The same with the attack warning received by two workers at the Odigo messaging service two hours before the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center. There wasn't even any in-depth investigation into the foreigners caught after filming themselves cheering as the towers burned, not even after stating they were only there to 'Document' the disaster, which of course implied they'd known about it beforehand. And the same media which usually went about thoroughly following up every conceivable angle of stories had instead sat on protests by very alive and well people claiming to be the ones in the photos shown of the 9/11 hijackers.

Aaron and doubtless many others had the feeling that Sept 11 was just another in the series of suspicious incidents provoked or allowed to happen to start wars with dubious end results. WW1 ended with no victor, except countless millions dead, the end of empires and the stage set for WW2. The general public didn't know about the naval blockade of Japans oil which forced them to act for their own survival, and the intelligence community quietly removed most references to the intercepted "East winds, rain" message informing the Japanese military that America was the chosen target before the Pearl Harbor attack. WW2 ended with no victor, except even more millions dead and Communism entrenched in Europe. The gulf of Tonkin incident with a warship deliberately infringing North Vietnamese territory to provoke retaliatory gunfire and start the Vietnam War was another; that war ended with no victors, a huge debt, 50,000 American dead and a divided population. And the "War on Terror" ended with no victors, except National Sovereignties and assets turned over to international interests, National rights to defense curtailed, economies teetering on collapse, a vast increase in surveillance and Freedoms sharply curtailed.

Even if Sept 11 wasn't expected, it was certainly appreciated in certain quarters. Almost immediately the Patriot acts and increased surveillance laws were passed, and one law after another was quietly pushed through Congress, usually during unrelated major news stories so the public remained blissfully unaware of what was happening until it was too late. The Economic sanctions against Syria were brought into force at the same time as the massive broadcasts of the capture of that arch enemy of the US, Saddam Hussein, so once again the general public never even knew about them until they were announced a year later. The second amendment was quietly shelved, and anyone owning more than one Firearm was liable to instant arrest for "Possession of weapons of mass destruction".

Shortly thereafter followed the bombing campaigns and invasions to bring "Democracy and Freedom" to those formerly prosperous and free nations, now ruined, half starved, economically bankrupt and devoid of meaningful leadership. Almost impossible to disprove pretexts of 'harboring terrorists', 'withholding intelligence', 'unwarranted occupation of territory' and the favorite 'possession of weapons of mass destruction' sufficed to send in the troops. The few senior Intelligence and other staff who disagreed with the contrived threat assessments derived using questionable intelligence were replaced by others who rushed to obey the unstated political will of their masters, the rest kept their mouths shut and followed suit if they wanted to remain employed. No matter how hard those poor countries cooperated with UN inspectors, if it started to become clear there was no basis for war the teams were withdrawn under the slightest claim of 'non-cooperation' before the bombers went in. The leaders of those nations, knowing full well the long term consequences of what was about to happen, opened the national armories for the

population to hide and use as best as they could. And few in the West took notice of the military stating that their first target in every country and every city was the independent media in order that the full facts of the destruction and civilian casualties could be concealed. It went without saying that controlling the media was the very first and most essential step in the process to turn a free country into an occupied, unwilling host.

When the invading troops had finished their destruction, a long list of conditions was quietly imposed for the withdrawal of forces. Aaron saw them once before the media curtain fell. Among them were sales taxes to pay for the cost of 'freeing' them, the handover of all national assets to their longstanding local enemy for sale to overseas corporations, and troops to be available on demand for future local conflicts and suppression of any resistance. It was a Brave, foolhardy or greedy local person approved by the allied coalition who dared to rule over those once-sovereign nations afterward, especially when the populations by and large wisely refused orders from the new subservient regimes to hand in their weapons. Many of the potential leaders and political opponents in those countries had thereafter been arrested or killed in mysterious attacks; for example Doctors, Professors, Teachers and Mayors. The deaths were portrayed in Western media as being done by dissidents, terrorists and revenge attacks, while the evidence in many cases pointed to outside forces. Little mercy was shown toward the civilian population who chose to fight back against the regime imposed on them, no effort was spared to wipe them out, and even the western media didn't bother to hide the evidence of gross breaches of the Geneva convention when it casually showed the killing of wounded prisoners as if it were a perfectly natural state of affairs. Aaron was reminded of the statement by secular leader President Rafsanjani in the former Iran about the 1993 Waco massacre: "If they do that to their own citizens, just think of what they would do to us."

Even friendly monarchies were ordered to change under threat to democracies and put their assets up for sale to multinational corporations in order that their populations could enjoy 'Freedom'. In Saudi Arabia that process was pushed along by the suspicious and spectacular Terrorist bombing of the giant Ras Tanura refinery, after which extreme haste was given to reopening the long closed Haifa oil pipeline from Iraq to Israel, which in turn became the main exporter of Middle Eastern oil.

After seeing what happened to their neighbors, once hostile Governments rushed to comply with the US line lest the same happen to them, their leaders now seemingly existing only to discern the latest US line on "Terror" and agreeing with it.

That "war" against one Middle East nation after another was the catalyst for a suicide bombing campaign culminating in the midday demolition of a Washington DC Skyscraper by Terrorists who'd rented an entire floor of Office space, then over a matter of weeks slowly filled it with Explosives delivered in Office supplies boxes so as not to arouse suspicion from the other building tenants. There were many different kinds of warfare, and the dozen simultaneous outbreaks of Foot and Mouth disease across the US shouldn't have been such a surprise to the government. Neither should have been the crop spraying aircraft which flew in at rooftop height and dumped Mustard gas over the White House. And neither should the woman carrying a cigarette packet filled with Dioxin who'd made the entire Congress building unusable, perhaps forever. US policies had created more Terrorism than they'd fought, and the Chickens had definitely come home to Roost.

Of course the Bush administration instantly stepped in with billions of

dollars to bring in more and yet more security, ID checks and restrictive laws to further hamstringing the law abiding population. It seemed there was never any difficulty in finding money to try to deal with the symptoms of a sick America, but none whatsoever for curing the cause itself. Security was steadily tightened further and further everywhere except the Northern and Southern borders, where the Terrorists had simply walked across the border hidden among hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants who crossed yearly. It made an absolute joke of the supposed Homeland Security service. The media never stated that only some of the illegal immigrants who crossed the Southern border were actually Mexican. And they absolutely never mentioned that the attack on the World Trade Center wouldn't have occurred if tabs had been kept on immigrants. Law Enforcement weren't even allowed to check on an arrestee's immigration status any more or to arrest even previously deported illegal immigrants they recognized on the street.

Instead of simply educating more basic lifestyles and encouraging higher birth rates among those capable of bearing Children into a good environment, the Government had directly and indirectly encouraged incompatible peoples from countries which had destroyed themselves to migrate to the First world supposedly "to do the jobs Americans wouldn't do" and "to increase the number of younger people". These immigrants and their uncontrolled offspring brought the same lifestyles and attitudes which had destroyed their own countries; they refused to adapt to American ways and assimilate into the culture and became productive, voting citizens. Instead, they remained loyal only to their own people and not to other American citizens, and seemed intent on creating their own country based on what they'd left behind. They appeared to believe immigration to a new country meant others did what they wanted, and it ended up being Americans trying to adapt to their ways. In their countries, you conformed or else, they didn't make exceptions for anyone. And why should they? But in the West, even Immigrant advocacy groups no longer promoted legal immigration, citizenship, learning English or any other assimilation into the country. So much for 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. The result was the Ethnic gang-controlled nightmares the cities had become.

Many including Aaron believed that was a matter of deliberate policy, and the Terrorists and Criminals were being simply used as an excuse for changes the public would never have remotely supported otherwise, and which were steadily underway. Even the trade unions, business associations and producer organizations who'd traditionally resisted change had quietly made their peace with the Government and now pushed the establishment line.

The Intelligence net kept on tightening, all in the name of national and global security. The operating system giants had long wanted the power to scan computers for copyright infringements and to block owners from accessing them even from on their own computers, and in the latest versions of their systems they finally got it. All the owner could do thereafter was delete it, even if it was material they'd produced themselves. At the same time the government also quietly gained the legal power they'd wanted for a long time to access private systems in search of material they didn't approve of and either take action against the owner or delete it on the spot. They'd had the ability to do so for many years, now they could be upfront about it.

And even if you didn't have the very latest operating systems, you couldn't connect to the Internet or conduct business any more without the new free "NetSafe" activity monitoring software installed on your computer, watching every keystroke, mouse click and website you visited, completing Government control over the Net. Popular nicknames for it included "Nazi Safe" and "National Socialist software". Those countries and ISP's which refused to comply were simply shut out from the Networks until they buckled under.

The Three Evils of Terrorism, Hacking and Child Pornography were responsible for the software, so the media said day in and day out. None of the media people selected to applaud the software launch stopped to suggest that if Operating Systems had been properly written and set up in the first place, Hacking wouldn't have been a serious issue. And fewer still wondered about the curious fact that the criminal Newsgroups, Websites and IRC channels could have been permanently wiped out or blocked out many years before with just a few server commands, and yet they were allowed to remain and even proliferate with only the occasional token bust. Until the day the software was foisted on all as a supposed cure for all that was wrong with the Net.

Strangely, the additional and far more prevalent evils of Drug trafficking, Fraud, Organized Crime, Illegal immigration and Gang Crime were never addressed in conjunction with the software. And Gun crime was only mentioned together with more and more restrictive laws aimed at curbing legal and registered ownership, and never aimed at the Criminals who already illegally owned and misused them, and who of course never gave them up.

For a few short weeks programmers reported how NetSafe worked; how the software communicated current status, its trigger keywords, its operating files. They quickly discovered that along with monitoring, it enabled total and absolute remote control over your computer, deleting anti-virus, Firewall and Encryption software at will if it were perceived to be impeding the software, and uploading chosen files to a destination you weren't allowed to know. In return it gave you protection... of a sort. It had a very good process monitor which instantly detected unusual applications misusing Net access or hiding behind other programs to do the same, blocking the spread of Viruses as well as assisting in watching the unwilling user. It was widely believed to be the successor to the Law Enforcement Trojan horse program called "DIRT", which was considered to be poorly done and easily stopped by Firewalls according to the Hackers who'd stolen and analyzed it. "DIRT" also permitted police to upload bogus evidence to a machine and offered no auditing controls by which they might be caught.

NetSafe went infinitely further and was protected by Federal Law also. To start with it was easy to disable, deleting one file deleted it's search parameters. The next version of the software integrated itself so thoroughly into the OS that any attempt to remove it stopped the computer working completely, and interfering in any way with it was an offense liable to long jail terms. Additionally, ISPs everywhere were required to install email scanner software which detected cryptography and steganography for in the unlikely event that people managed to slip things past NetSafe. Banks and all businesses reported a vast increase in data output, all due to the compulsory software without which they weren't allowed to pursue business. Then all such discussions abruptly vanished from the Net.

The arrests began almost immediately afterward. People searching for Keywords like "Government Resistance" were promptly hauled in for interrogation. All websites opposing the government moves were simultaneously blocked then removed. Writing code that in any way resembled a virus sparked an instant police operation often ending in lifelong jail terms.

Few stopped to think that none of those arrested were indicted on charges related to the reasons given for introduction of the software. The Government had pretended that the ever increasing security measures were designed to defend Freedom. So why it was that Americans were losing their Freedom instead? The only people whose Freedom was increasing were the real criminals.

Meanwhile the social situation dissolved into chaos. The no-go areas slowly

then more rapidly expanded while Law Enforcement efforts declined, they were afraid of lawsuits for judicial "abuse", "brutality", "profiling", "unjustified searches" and "excessive force" brought under the most trivial pretexts. Crimes which made certain peoples look bad were barely investigated if at all, and if the victim or their friends somehow got the news into the mainstream the Police were more likely to interview the victim about their motives for doing so than investigate the crime itself. The Courts soon turned into a legal jungle where the only cases guaranteed prosecutions were the ones brought under the Patriot acts and NetSafe software. The Police quickly realized it was much less trouble to spend the day quietly parked in their Cars filling in crosswords rather than arresting Thugs, and Criminals had a field day.

Other social services were similarly affected, Hospitals were so scared of lawsuits that illegal immigrants often received priority care regardless of the fact they rarely had insurance. Those Hospitals which ran out of money as a result were shutting down all over the country.

Pickup trucks full of Gang members sped through the streets at night, yelling, shooting and attacking at whim. People locked inside their houses and armed in some cases with little more than knives and pickaxes could only pray the vehicles wouldn't stop outside their homes. Apartment buildings and areas Gangs decided to take over were targeted by continual gunfire aimed through windows, and then the Gangs stormed in and drove the remaining residents out, if they were lucky. More and more people were disappearing all the time, never to be seen again, which was never mentioned in the media. Aaron personally knew of a few people who had simply vanished after being caught in the wrong area at the wrong time. Others had vanished from their homes in even the 'safest' areas. Rumors grew of massacres in Gang occupied areas, which the Police refused to confirm or deny. Trampers were more and more often stumbling across entire families who'd fled into the hills to escape the urban terror and died at their own hands rather than stay in the cities.

Schools turned into hotbeds of Ethnic racial terror, with Gang members passing weapons through windows to bypass metal detectors then openly attacking students on mass Day after day Aarons children and the other Children in the area returned home crying, begging not to be sent back there again. Instead of learning, they constantly strove not to do too well at anything so they didn't stand out and become the target of 'students' whose sole topics of conversation were violence, sex, gambling and drugs, and who had no intention of learning anything. Instead of socializing, they spent every second of every day trying to constantly remain in sight of a teacher, supervisor or security guard, and if they couldn't, hoping that group deliberately blocking the hallway would let them past, that they wouldn't accidentally stray into Gang members' dedicated space, make fleeting eye contact with the wrong person, be caught having the wrong brand of clothing, or any number of slights which could result in a bashing. There were so many ways to fall foul of the primal hate filled Black youths who only listened to other Blacks, and whose parents exploded with rage if anyone tried talking to them about their behavior. Worse than the violence were the continual obscene remarks in class, in corridors and outside school from groups of boys toward girls too young to know what they meant, and occasionally attempted fondling as they had to walk past them.

The response to the beatings and terror was a visit from an education expert who completely overlooked the unprovoked violence while explaining to the students at length how hatred is not the right way, and tolerance, acceptance, respect, brotherhood, peace, reconciliation of differences and appreciation of diversity is the path they should take, and that everyone is equal and no one

should be singled out for any reason. They had to understand that living in a diverse society was in the long run healthier, more vibrant, personally enriching and more productive than short term success, that the school system was focusing on the needs of the culturally diverse community and not on any one group, and that the trouble makers were not representative of the entire group, and further, that they should utilize the diversity in their reach and make it their own. All they needed was understanding and to be given a chance, they were told.

Barely an hour later during their lunch break the Children were screaming in terror as they watched Black gang members chase a White boy through the school grounds and hold him down by his arms for the shortest and youngest of them to kick and stomp him in the face until he was unconscious with blood splattered on the ground, while a hundred more Gang members and associates from among the students stood around cheering them on and laughing. As soon as the Police arrived the attackers melted into the crowd then tried to claim the victim and all the witnesses were mistaken. The next day there was a stabbing by the same group, and a few hours later Gang members stood near an unguarded toilet block until a White girl entered, followed her in and tried to rape her. Two boys who tried to defend her were promptly attacked by dozens of gang members and hospitalized, then on their return forced to leave school for good after days of continual abuse by Gang members. That evening a woman was thrown off a walkway across from the school by Gang members who'd decided that was 'their territory' and 'their turf'. Finally things got so bad the time came when Aaron and Barbara refused to make their kids go to school any more.

Barbara's workplace had been near a no-go area, and only weeks after they withdraw their children from school she'd arrived at her work one morning to see dozens of gang members trying too hard to look innocent as they stood around near her office buildings entrance, and she took the only reasonable option and turned and drove away. Nobody answered her calls to work that day, or ever again. Yet another area had been abandoned to lawlessness.

There had been spontaneous resistance, some successful, some not, little of which was reported in the media so as not to give people ideas.

Farmers along the Southern border were arrested for using Firearms to stop illegal immigrants. In response, three-quarters of the Farmers across the entire country simultaneously dropped tools and went on strike, refusing to support the Government any longer and threatening to burn their crops instead. The strike leaders were immediately arrested and sentenced after show trials to life without parole.

One enterprising newspaper reporter who'd lost his wife in a shooting invited his Liberal newspaper editor to accompany him personally to see a "major breaking story" in person. For years the editor had promoted "Tolerance", but had never been exposed to the problem firsthand, until his reporter stopped in the middle of a Gang infested area and forced him out of the car at gunpoint. Police found his body hours later after fighting a running battle to get to the place a phone call had stated he'd be.

In the suburbs many had opened fire on marauding Thugs and caused temporary improvements in their areas, but invariably it was them who ended up leaving, not the criminals. The most successful so far had temporarily created a free zone comprising 40 square kilometers of safe space in suburban Los Angeles. Exactly how it began and who was responsible was uncertain, but most accounts said a solitary man called "Edwards" had started the uprising by using a silenced rifle to gun down a dozen Criminals attacking a woman outside her house, then chased and shot down the surviving thugs as they fled. An hour

later he again single-handedly mowed down an entire Pickup truck full of Gang members as they raced through the street. By then the neighbors had heard and seen what was happening and promptly joined in. By the end of the first night hundreds were dead and people were roving the streets with every Gun they had. An amazing arsenal was to be seen, ranging from little .22 pistols to lethal .50 caliber sniper rifles and everything in between, toted by everyone from 10 years and up. Elderly residents carried loaded shotguns in public and were cheered for doing so. Even a few Police Officers on seeing what was happening, threw their badges to the ground and cast their lot in with the residents. Lethal and accurate sniper fire from former military personnel who'd swarmed to join the fight quickly began emptying area after Gang infested area. It was tit for tat, it was street fighting at its absolute worst, with no quarter given or expected. It was an unspoken fact that at the first sign of organized resistance, the Gangs had simply fled.

The government response was instant. Cordons went up blockading the entire area, and then the residents were ordered to cease fire and surrender for questioning. Naturally they refused, and the Army was sent in. Days later the TV news gleefully showed the few surviving holdouts led out at gunpoint, hands up and heads looking down while a group of Officers including the local Army commander looked on. That was the only footage they showed. What they refused to say, but was reported widely later, was that seconds after that footage ended Edwards stepped out of a media cordon, pulled a pistol and shot the Army commander dead before being cut down himself in a hail of bullets.

Predictably the controlled media denounced in the most violently criminal terms the events in LA. Over and over in endless films, documentaries, news programs, newspaper articles and commentaries the media personally slammed Edwards and completely distorted everything he stood for as the very worst in terrorism and hate that had to be wiped out for the good of everyone.

Aaron thought he could see a pattern there, the more directly you acted against state sponsored crime, the more personally they attacked you. Of course the media also neglected to say that what happened had been only a small taste of what the Black and Hispanic Gangs had been dishing out to innocent people for decades. If it'd occurred the other way around the only thing that would've happened would be a temporary influx of Police officers standing on street corners who were effectively powerless to intervene, and who would only contain the terror for a short time to give the unfortunate residents time to leave. On the rare occasions the Police were compelled to actually intervene in Gang controlled areas, the very same residents who'd screamed for the Police to do something about the killings promptly turned out in force to protest against 'Brutality' when the Police started to arrest criminals.

There were also the usual demands for yet tighter gun controls to prevent such a mindless atrocity happening again, and even suggestions that it was time the government considered trusting only the police and military with guns. Nobody dared publicly reply that every dictatorship had insisted on absolute monopolies on guns in the hands of their police and military. It wasn't hard to notice the similarity to the international campaign against 'Weapons of mass destruction', that too seemed much less about global security than ensuring only the 'select' had them as a deterrent against rebellion and invasion.

Another incident that'd briefly passed the media censors and reached the mainstream news before being silenced concerned an allied soldier in the former Syria who'd arrived back at HQ after a long day fighting insurgents and learned his family back home had been killed. He was informed of his loss by

Military Police who then immediately tried to disarm him and send him home. He went on a shooting rampage against senior staff instead, and was glimpsed on TV shouting and demanding to know "What are we fighting here for instead of guarding our own borders?" A week afterward Aaron searched for that news item on line in the hopes of finding a follow-up, but it had been completely excised without a hint remaining anywhere. Someone high up had been very busy he decided, and he wished he'd saved it off before it'd vanished into the memory hole.

He didn't know how lucky he was that he hadn't.

An entire way of life just does not disappear without a whisper, he thought. Everyone at least vaguely knew what was happening to America was wrong, even if they couldn't admit it to themselves. People take a stand, movements rise up. No matter how hard it was suppressed, resistance forms, like minded people get together, even if never spoken of. It had to be out there, and lots of it, waiting for the opportunity. He and everyone he knew wanted to fight. All it'd taken was one man to reach his limit, open fire and it'd begun. Russian peasants had similarly hanged Revolutionaries when the Red Terror began. Hopefully they slowly strangled for half an hour without a drop, he mused. They deserved it for what they did to that poor country. Just like the Politicians deserved it for what they'd done to America today.

A few months after the battle for Los Angeles was lost, Aaron and his neighbors had conferred about their immediate futures. They were in the exact same predicament as his family, they'd met and consoled each other numerous times in the last few years as bad news after bad news came in, friends and family members killed, disappeared or worse, jobs lost, homes lost, savings lost.

They'd made room in spare rooms, garages, and in more than one case the back yard as family and friends were forced to leave homes.

Aarons family too had helped in that regard. Friends of Barbara's and their young daughter had come to them almost begging for help after fleeing their home in a hurry and having to leave most of their belongings behind. They needed shelter; it was given without hesitation and for as long as they needed it. Each week the adults swapped between sleeping on the couches in the lounge and in the master bedroom.

"All right, what can we do?" his long time friend Stevie had begun.

"We should stay right here and take a stand!", an angry man suggested. Gareth was his name. Aaron liked Gareth, while others tended to shy away from him; it was widely known he'd done time in prison. He came across as an occasionally defensive person who didn't like to talk about his past. Aaron had seen a more sensitive and humorous side to him, which was no doubt the reason why he had a partner and four children. One statement in particular he'd made to Aaron struck him, in conversation one time he'd casually commented that he rarely had a single thing in his house other than fruit that didn't require cooking before consumption, anything else was too easy for him.

"Oh yes, and what about us?", Stevie's wife Hillary replied.

"There's nothing stopping you from picking up a gun too."

"And what about THEM!" she angrily replied, pointing at the Children playing outside. There were things to be said here that their ears shouldn't have to hear.

Aaron turned to his wife Barbara for a moment before making his addition to the discussion. She was two years older than he was with long wispy black hair and sparkling blue eyes which complimented her personality, she had a subtle sense of humor and loved to surprise people. Billy, 12, who was playing outside with the other kids, had reddish brown hair he'd inherited from his side of the family, and like Aaron he was an avid sportsman and loved the outdoors. Cassy was 10, she had her Mothers hair as well as freckles from his side of the family, like most girls she was the more confident of the two children despite being younger, but she was also careful never to overstep the mark with her brother. She was an avid reader and fast learner; she loved her studies and gardening. In the future Cassy should have had boyfriends lining up for her proud parents to meet and approve of.

What future, he sadly thought, and not for the first time as he watched her happily playing with the other kids. America had at absolute most one generations time remaining of a first world lifestyle. He hated to think what she or her future family would have to endure in the third world America being slowly and cruelly wrought by its own government, with the intentional permanent destruction of its entire way of life as the apparent long term aim. There was no way he was going to have his family end up like some unfortunates in this sick, unsupportive country when their options ran out; dead or destitute, driven from their homes, living from day to day out of their cars, constantly moving from place to place looking for the next meal or place to stay. Their own time was running out, in more ways than one. On one income their savings were inexorably dropping, and there was little prospect of that changing as businesses naturally divested from areas in the face of encroaching third world invasion. He could see them hitting the wall and ending up the same way. It was time to start looking to other solutions.

Aaron took a deep breath, and asked the unspoken question he'd been wondering a long time.

"Is there a Resistance movement? Does anyone know of one?", he finally blurted out, "I'm sick of living like this, we don't deserve to be living in fear, and it should be the scum who're afraid of the law!"

Silence. Forbidden question. It was almost thought crime to as much as think along those lines.

"If you know what's good for you, don't go out looking for any, because you won't find one!", a neighbor snapped at him.

Aaron had long since come to that conclusion himself, he was well aware there were plenty of supposedly anti-Government websites which were actually run by Law Enforcement, it had even been admitted as such in the media. Nothing was more guaranteed to be under intensive surveillance than anything remotely related to organized resistance. In the old days people coming to Law Enforcement attention were placed under Internet surveillance for extended periods, along with anyone who contacted them during that time, in the off-chance Government agencies had uncovered the tip of a larger conspiracy. If anything they'd be even more intensely watched now.

Even criticism of government policies or influential people had become taboo; it wasn't even a secret that you were monitored for doing so. It had started with criminalizing protests within the sight of the President but had quickly and quietly progressed. In a Democracy you were supposed to be able to say anything reasonable and non threatening to them in person or electronically. Nowadays you were likely to have search warrants served on your ISP and

workplace, be thrown out of both for embarrassing them, and that on top of having your house searched for weapons or subversive literature. And god help you if any were found.

In the past the anti-Government activists were invariably portrayed as antagonists right out of the Hollywood Cliche Manual of Style; they were obnoxious, loud-mouthed, dressed to offend buffoons any child could see through. The Media and Law Enforcement alike perpetuated this image by infiltrating any potential resistance, recording them for months or years and even plying them with alcohol and leading conversations along extreme lines if need be to get a few desired sentences on tape. As soon as they heard a few words of assent, the doors were smashed down and everyone in sight arrested on conspiracy charges. And when all else failed, political Law Enforcement had one last trick up their sleeve. When they judged that the media produced distrust of anyone opposing the Government ran deeply enough, any unopposed suggestion of illegal activity was enough to secure conviction in trials held in places where the jury members couldn't come to any other verdict if they wanted to continue living where they were.

With the demise of any and all organized potential US Resistance, the media had taken a more subtle tact to weed out potential dissent. In movies, TV programs and especially in schools the same themes were starting to be repeated over and over; if you didn't report untoward speech or people who strongly disagreed with the Government, something nasty invariably happened, followed by the actors in these films suddenly coming to the realization "Why didn't I report what was said? I could have prevented this". Resistance and blind hate were one and the same, and in fact one never existed without the other. Even criticism of government policies was suspect and should be treated warily they suggested, it was one of the possible steps on the path to Terror. The World was full of Evil Conspirators who were out to destroy our Freedom, and only the ever watchful public together with the full might of Law Enforcement could stop them. These Conspirators were nastier and more insidious than anything which had gone before; they looked, acted and dressed just like everyone else. They could be your neighbor, your music teacher or even your best friend. It was what they said that made them different. They spoke against things like gun control, illegal immigration and Gang crime, and they even appeared to genuinely believe that the media wasn't telling them the whole truth. Actions were only a thought away, and incorrect speech was right on the brink. You were even entitled to use violence against people who uttered incorrect words, the media hinted.

At the same time a new trend had silently begun. Certain trials began taking place in secrecy without any media coverage, and only the sentence was announced afterward. Imprisonment on trumped up charges with extraordinarily long sentences wasn't enough any more when the leaders and senior members of the former anti-Government groups were still contactable. The few released detainees from Guantanamo bay reported that nobody important was kept there, all the big fish were somewhere else. Neither the military nor law enforcement would say where. Emboldened by the near total lack of public or media outrage at the Guantanamo bay isolation camp, anyone who could lead by example began quietly vanishing from prisons while the police looked the other way. The media had stereotyped and judged those unfortunates during their show trials on taxation irregularities, firearm technicalities or wild accusations brought with paid informants, so few other than their immediate families thought much about it. Stalin's red terror had been reborn in a more subtle form; his victims families eventually got a government letter saying they'd been sentenced with no right to send or receive mail. The families and friends of today's disappeared didn't even get that. All they were told if they inquired was that they'd been moved elsewhere, and they weren't allowed to know where.

In the last few years Aaron had sometimes thought the only real differences between Stalinist Russia then and America now were the more subtle and refined ideological, educational and media control. From the way the media only reported politically and racially convenient events, he sometimes wondered if the Western press comprised the same people transplanted from Mother Russia, but with the benefit of lessons learned from experience. The fear, the legal penalties and lifetime social vilification resulting from exposure of incorrect words or thoughts, of being seen to step out of political line, they were all there. So too were the party adherents whose whole existence in positions of power depended on toeing the party line exactly lest they be expelled. Your political representatives were now even legally required to stay with their party and not exercise their own free will, and people still didn't think to question why.

And of course there was the seemingly ever increasing state police and security apparatus whose job it was to watch over law abiding citizens. After LA, there was nothing the police hammered harder than potential resistance. It used to be that you could trust the individual Officer, they knew what was right even if it wasn't strictly legal, but in the last few decades the overall Police attitude had steadily changed from protection and slight condescension to overbearing bullies with a personal political axe to grind at odds with their supposed role of looking after the general population. You didn't dare trust them with anything or speak to them without representation present, their role didn't seem to be to separate good from evil any more, just to make someone pay, irrespective of who actually started the problem. If you reported Gangs firing at your house, they were more likely to immediately raid you and take away both your guns and your license, leaving you helpless. Once word of that got out people quickly stopped calling the police, leading to an instant drop in reported crime and a subsequent 'improvement' in local statistics.

And in case after case in the news, the Police went after the innocent who happened to oppose the government and left the real criminals alone, which made Aaron shudder. As George Orwell wrote, 'The defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy'. Every Tyranny throughout history had always proclaimed its morality and stated it was a Democracy, even while it steadily removed freedoms from its people. History had shown that whenever justice mixed with politics, the result was slavery. And damned if the same thing wasn't happening again.

"There used to be lots of them, they warned us things would get this bad but nobody took them seriously. And now look what's happened", Stevie replied.

Everyone nodded and murmured assent.

It was always a case of 'if only...' these days. If only they'd taken notice of the gradual changes that were imposed on them, if only the Judges had refused to co-operate, if only people had been allowed to vote against the changes, if only the politicians hadn't been so weak, if only one major controlled newspaper had taken a stand and spoken out to alert people, if only one political insider had turned around and alerted people on prime-time TV.

Aaron remembered the arrests a few weeks after NetSafe had come into force. All websites remotely against the Government had simultaneously been taken down and the operators arrested. Some of the more organized ones had foreseen this move and disposed of their hard drives so their membership lists and visitor logs wouldn't fall into Law Enforcement hands. It was never admitted of course, but reliable word had it that even the identified casual visitors

to the former resistance sites suddenly faced endless problems. When their firearms licenses came up for renewal, they were declined without reason given. They were singled out for lengthy airport security and traffic stops, refused government employment at any level. The site operators who'd taken precautions could hardly be expected to remember the details of everyone who'd subscribed to their views, which left an unknown and more than likely ever-growing number of like-minded people out there somewhere. Since then there'd been few related arrests, which naturally the controlled media trumpeted on the occasions they occurred. People who didn't hit trigger phrases or searches couldn't be tracked, and presumably their degree of pre-organized offline and in-person Networking was unknown.

Everyone was hoping organized wide resistance would spontaneously start, or a city or entire state to declare itself independent and take radical justice to bring the lawlessness under control once and for all. The fact of the matter was that it was now impossible to vote in someone with a platform of true reform, either the media would ensure he never saw the light of day or else he'd be promptly arrested on speech crime and provocation charges. A true leader prepared to speak his mind simply wasn't permitted, and the demographics of the cities were such that they'd never allow it in any case.

Is that what Democracy was truly all about, Aaron wondered. Politicians fighting each other in their haste to head straight to the bottom, enabling the lowest common denominator to win by only slightly more civilized mob rule. Major topics like stopping and reversing illegal immigration, stopping aid to countries which hated and despised us, severe welfare reform and cutbacks, turning the porous southern border into a mined chain-link fence, major education reform, radical reform of the media, permanent isolation or expulsion of the criminal underclass, enforcement of existing law instead of introducing new law to further control the law abiding, cutting out bureaucracy to encourage production, admission of productive and compatible peoples and stopping Americas crusades against freedom, were never election issues.

The public didn't seem to notice that Americas rulers had subtly cut off all meaningful contact with the public and took no notice whatsoever of anything they wanted. They never allowed important issues or majority-held opinions to become the subject of binding referendums or feedback, let alone elections. Important legislation regarding foreign and domestic policy changes were never subject to public submissions or even announced beforehand to give people a chance to object, they were simply presented to the public as having been done. Those too were firmly out of the hands of citizens. Freedom was only an illusion when you had no choice whatsoever in what changes were imposed on your society and country, he thought.

Voters could only squabble over the irrelevant scraps thrown out for them to fight over, or better yet things which had already been decided upon, such as minor health reforms and environmental controls. And they didn't even get that. The typical stakes were so small that elections might as well not have been held at all, and yet every single time the media trotted out the line "The most critical election of our generation". They must be laughing at the gullible public who fell for it time after time, he thought. He imagined politicians laughing as they promised the masses what they wanted to hear at firework and balloon extravaganzas designed to appeal to children's instincts, but delivering exactly the same as previous administrations. Nothing ever changed after elections, only the faces, but the public still seemed to genuinely believe their vote could make a difference. The only thing that changed was the current puppet, not whoever was pulling the strings and guiding policy to the detriment of all.

No matter who won, the public lost and the slow downward spiral of society continued.

"All it'd take is for someone to start it, then everyone will join in", Aaron suggested, "We wouldn't be alone in this for long."

"Yes, they would, and then the Army would kill them!", Barbara snapped.

"Aaron, the people probably wouldn't even hear about it if it happened again!", Stevie added.

As much as he hated to admit it, that was more than likely true.

"Ten times more people die every year in US cities than in every terror attack combined", Gareth snorted, "The only difference is that the Government won't send the Army into those areas"

"It's probably closer to a hundred times now", Aaron commented.

"Well, if the Government won't protect its citizens, then there's trouble coming. I'm all for fighting if that's what it takes, but this isn't the place for it", Stevie replied.

"Then where is? The people in LA didn't care; it was life or death for them. You're just clinging to hope things will get better. They won't!", Gareth snapped.

"Any ideas then?"

"I say we go elsewhere, we get out of here and go where it's safe", Aaron suggested.

"We've been through that many times, there's no such place anymore, you know that", Stevie replied.

A month before Stevie had driven from city to city, checked through aerial photos, searched for exclusive medium to high income areas, all without success. All there was were Ethnic Gangs and decaying areas and slowly vanishing relatively safe areas. Apart from a few exclusive and gated super high income areas, other places had been opened to all under orders from government legislation. Every community was required by law to have a plan for inclusion of lower income housing, opening the floodgates to the predatory gangs who instantly set about attacking and driving out law abiding citizenry.

In years past Aaron had driven through the worst areas of the city out of curiosity, and was surprised to find that past the urban decay, the filth, the graffiti and the Gang dominated areas were entire blocks where nobody went at all. He'd driven through vacant debris strewn streets; past perfectly maintainable boarded up buildings and vacant lots and even abandoned Skyscrapers, all without spotting a soul. It was an amazing sight, it was a developers dream, but nobody in their right mind would think of renovating or moving there.

He was reminded of a Cancer, and the more he thought about it, the more the analogy fitted. Completely incompatible parasitic tissue invading a healthy host, not making the slightest effort to co-exist while the host bent over backwards to try and accommodate it regardless of the assaults it launched, mindless of the fact that in the long term it caused the death of its host and even its own death. It expanded, causing suffering, and in the middle was oxygen and nutrient deprived necrotic dead and dying tissue.

So too were the Gang infested areas. The newest low-income housing blocks built by cities were quickly rendered unlivable by the tenants, the stores and food outlets were robbed and shoplifted until they went broke or moved elsewhere, then the Criminals went with them, leaving entire completely vacant blocks. They produced nothing, maintained nothing; they weren't interested in learning even the slightest living skills and even despised work, often shunning and attacking those few from their areas who did. They were only interested in taking from the host. And why shouldn't they? There was no encouragement of any kind from the Government for them to do otherwise. And it was never their own fault; it was somehow always the Hosts' fault that they never made progress in the modern world. They lived day to day with no thought for the future; they slept during the day and preyed at night. There were no gardens, no food reserves, nothing, just endless miles of shattered, decaying concrete.

Instead of investigating case by case those who didn't contribute toward society, the Dysfunctional parents were allowed to breed dysfunctional children and lots of them, with state support guaranteed, with absolutely no quality controls built into the system. While pretending to address the cause of crime, always stated to be poverty instead of the people committing the crime, Western governments had only increased welfare dependency and brought in more policies to break down traditional fabric of society. And despite the enormous welfare spending showered upon them, more often than not their kids went without the basics, their entire existence being merely to provide an income from the government for parents who neglected them and let them run rampant. Even animals treat their offspring better than these people do, he angrily thought. And now those same disturbed, criminal children were in turn having their own copious broods. Everyone knew what kind of lives those kids were going to lead, especially with the complete lack of positive role models, but none dared openly say so. The Government had even gone as far as to reduce pensions to provide more support for these children. Naturally, the word "Responsibility" only caused an explosion of rage from these people. In fact, that word was never taught at all any more, only "Rights". Meanwhile, the economic downturn ensured the rest of the country was kept so busy earning a living paying taxes for these people that even with two incomes they themselves couldn't afford to, let alone have time for, bringing well-adjusted children into the world.

The hatred almost couldn't begin young enough in these areas; parents openly cheered on and encouraged their children as they attacked White kids intruding in 'their' playgrounds. The kids who didn't succumb to the hate were finally ordered by their parents and friends alike not to be friends with or even talk to Whites and to engage in behavior which helped turn their school into a war zone. In many cases the age of 12 seemed to be the general 'cut-off' point; Billy saw one former friend being told "What are you hanging around them for?", and he and his other former White friends were thereafter ignored when they tried to greet him. One of Aarons workmates commented on how odd it was that their kids Black friends never invited him to their homes, and how he was horrified to learn that many had been forbidden by their parents to visit White peoples houses. Aaron wasn't surprised, not any more. Even a few 6 year olds had been caught beating and stabbing Whites in 'their' schools while shouting "I hate you!" at them. The other kids didn't learn hate until after countless chases, beatings, being shoved down stairs and elbowed into walls by thugs walking 3 or 4 abreast down school hallways, being instantly attacked for trying to be friendly to them, having mindless abuse screamed at them and being stood over and robbed repeatedly, by groups of never less than three or more of ever younger pint-sized psychopaths.

As the makeup of cities and neighborhoods changed, the once friendly faces invariably changed to hate filled ones once the balance tipped, and the remaining Whites were ethnically cleansed, driven out by crime and pointed violence until huge parts of every city were absolutely segregated. And all this by the same people who loudly protested against apartheid.

A Gang leader interviewed on Television freely admitted they were creating strongholds for themselves, but insisted they only harmed those who wished them ill. Later in the same interview he casually stated "The Police are our enemy, so are the other gangs, the population too. Just about everybody is our enemy". He also happily stated that kids in those areas were taught by their parents not to cooperate with or talk to the Police but to ignore them even if approached on matters unrelated to them.

The social workers seemingly couldn't even admit to themselves that the occupants of those areas lived by a completely different mentality and no moral framework at all, where ignorance and hatred ruled supreme, violence was the solution to every problem, revenge for real or perceived slights and enforcing 'their' territory were the order of the day, preying on others was instinctive, and life had no value whatsoever unless they were immediate friends or family. When they felt like it, they'd beat people to death without any qualms for a nickel or a 'look'. The Drug-dealing parents watched approvingly as their teenagers taught their 8 and 10 year old siblings how to steal from Cars and terrorize younger kids, and the process repeated itself from one generation to the next. Criminal behavior was so entrenched that anyone coming under the slightest suspicion of informing was hated so much it was even acceptable to rape their children as retaliation, just as had happened in South Africa. Even the older Gang members feared the younger ones and were always watching their backs, but everyone agreed that if any Whites came into their area they'd stop attacking each other and would attack them.

Huge sums were spent trying to "rehabilitate" the gangs and crime ridden areas, which made Aaron laugh as they'd never been taught to "habilitate" in the first place, and for that matter they appeared incapable of benefiting from any help given to them over any length of time. The Government always had billions, tens of billions and in the long term, hundreds of billions to deal with the symptoms, he mused, but they would never spend even one dollar on the cause. How a Government could be so utterly blind and negligent for the future of its own country was beyond anyone's reasoning, it could only be the result of long term planning toward someone else's end.

For Eons the completely natural, healthy practice in hamlets, villages and towns had been zero tolerance for certain behaviors and to physically remove incompatible elements if need be. That process had been given names, stopped and reversed in the name of "Tolerance", while simultaneously the criminal elements hated Whites with a Genocidal wrath, as readily evidenced by the survivors of those who'd been foolhardy enough to end up in those areas.

A typical example was a family of Tourists who'd mistakenly gone into an area that'd been taken over by Gangs a few weeks before. With onlookers cheering them on, Black teenagers wearing the very latest designer label clothing and shoes shot to death the entire family including children at traffic lights for their credit cards and a hundred dollars in cash. None of the numerous onlookers could be bothered calling the Police. Identified after using the stolen credit cards, they fought and cursed the arresting officers, causing more than one witness to remark "They had no regard for authority at all. They had no remorse, they didn't care about anybody". Several were phoned by their parents to alert them that the Police were after them, and one led Police on a long car chase through streets filled with people alerted by the approaching

sirens and news helicopters, who cheered him on and even threw bottles and rubbish at the tailing Police cars. They smiled as they admitted what they'd done and explained to interrogators "We have to eat, we have to survive", but regardless still pleaded not guilty at every step of the drawn out legal process. The killers families defiantly defended them, one even complaining "All they had to do was pull him to the side and ask what happened. They didn't have to manhandle him like that". Their families and friends related on Television the unfortunate circumstances of the criminals, and the media cooperated by not showing inflammatory footage taken as they intimidated and abused the families of the victims both inside and outside the court, making it abundantly clear they didn't care that their family members were criminals, they seemed more concerned that they'd been hindered. And of course there were no subsequent interviews with the relatives of the victims. Not one single representative of the Black community condemned the senseless killings, just as had happened at many previous senseless crimes by Blacks against both Blacks and Whites alike.

When the completely uncontrolled breeding of criminals and equally uncontrolled immigration were taken into consideration with the state subsidized housing, food stamps, free medical treatment and other payments specifically aimed at them, it seemed the entire welfare system was geared toward "Farming" the very least qualified and able elements of society in order to promote discontent and economic disaster, all with the apparent intent of making an eventual excuse for heavy handed and finally, military control. History told that when incompatible peoples were forced together, the only way to control the resulting situation was a tyranny imposed by force. The tactic was as old as history, utilized right up to the modern day in the former Soviet Union, which had fragmented as soon as control had loosened. The Romans even had a name for it which stuck: "Divide and Conquer". Aaron sometimes wondered if these people knew they were only being used.

The only question was at what point it would happen, what spark would set it all off. There had been numerous smaller riots and a few bigger ones, like Los Angeles in 1993 and again more recently. Aaron viewed those events like storm systems; an unstable airflow finds a weak spot and pushes upward through cold air. How widely it spread and how long it lasted depended on the size of the initial spark and how well the media fanned it. Several other cities as well as LA had experienced simultaneous riots in '93; the storm system had been particularly unstable and well fanned by the news on that occasion. And things were becoming more so by the day. Only more and more vigorous Law Enforcement had held it in check. No longer. The only thing stopping it now was the media simply not reporting significant events, as though they were waiting for the right time.

The other thing Aaron thought was more than a coincidence was the complete lack of any sort of school taught food growing skills like there used to be. Some people had even complained that teaching agriculture was 'holding people back' and 'uncool', when it was giving them lifestyle options outside the cities and more importantly, away from Government control and susceptibility to economic crises. Only recently there'd been a fleeting news report that for the first time ever, 50% of mankind was now living in cities. He could almost smell a deathtrap; it seemed to him that the Government was producing a huge urban population instantly controllable by simple withdrawal of food if things got out of hand. He suspected that was the true reason past riots had stopped, not through any action of Law Enforcement. In hindsight, the whole thing sounded like a very long term plan coming to fruition. Perhaps that could work both ways, he thought...

The thought kept going round and round in his head, if their choices had been

cut so short and singular resistance was futile, he wasn't going to just depart without leaving something for the Government to choke on. And he knew how he was going to do that. But first things first.

"There is, but you may not like it", Aaron quietly replied.

"We're listening, Aaron", Stevie replied.

"We take up Farming. We all know the Gangs never live in the country; the city provides everything they need for free. We just go where they don't."

"We're all on the breadline as it is, we don't know the first thing about Farming, most of us have no jobs, and no Bank is going to loan us!"

"I didn't mean \*buy\* a Farm", he replied.

There were confused looks from the other people, and then one by one they twigged to what he meant.

"You must be out of your mind!", Gareth finally replied.

"The essentials of life are water, shelter and food. How hard can that be? Water is everywhere, Shelter can be built, and Food can be grown and caught."

They discussed the idea for hours, till well after it was dark. Some quietly agreed while others argued it was insane, impossible, they weren't ready for it. But it was practical. And the more they thought about it, there wasn't any choice. They all agreed to buy the needed books immediately and begin learning from them and to help each other as needed. And god knows there was a lot to learn and prepare. The very next day the first gardens began springing up in the back yards of those who didn't already have them. Not even the Children were told why, except that they suddenly had lists of jobs to do and texts to read and learn. It was treated like a game, and they immediately came to love it.

Late as it was, immediately after that meeting Aaron retired to the back room. As well as the properly updated and connected lounge computer, back here he had under a pile of books and papers an older laptop with a solar backup power supply which had never been upgraded, never connected to the Internet. Figuratively speaking it was little more than a toy compared to the monster CPU's readily available today. Onto that he'd placed all the numerous underground texts and programming tools he'd gathered before the curtain fell and mere unauthorized possession became an indictable federal offense. In years past they'd been merely useful in his programming job, tips and advice from hackers and even detailed how-to hacking advice from professionals and primers full of coding tricks. All very useful to avoid leaving exploitable holes in software and websites. As the social situation worsened, his feelings had changed from occasional casual viewing to idle contemplation and finally, when sufficiently angered, a plan for action.

Along with the rest of their neighbors he went out and purchased the books he needed from stores and second-hand shops. What he couldn't find in person, he immediately found with Net searches at a nearby Net Cafe and wrote it all to CD rather than search for it at home. The topics were many and varied, and he began with simple outdoors survival. He'd taken a basic forest survival course in school, what he needed to learn now went way beyond that. Makeshift and long term shelters, edible and medicinal plants, roots and wild fruits, berries and mushrooms, sources of pure water, trapping and preparing small

animals and snakes for food. His father had taken him out hunting several times and taught him a few things, but not the art of preserving fur and hides. Growing vegetables was a huge topic in itself. All his life he'd grown some of their own food and knew the basics, preparing the soil, planting times and spacing, seed depth and plant diseases. Now he had to learn the things he'd tended to overlook; plant propagation, making seeds, identifying needed mineral additives. Then came the more difficult topics; Log house construction, long term Food storage, Clothing manufacture.

His late Father, the instructor at school and the books all said the same thing; you can live in the Jungle, the Forest, the Desert and even in the Ice. You only had to learn how. Man 200 years ago was comfortable where todays man would die. And learn he did. The Forest was the easiest to survive in, the worst was debatable, in his opinion it was a toss-up between the Desert and the Jungle. He was lucky in that he knew some things already; some of their neighbors had never planted a seed in their lives and had barely even set foot in a Forest.

Fitness was a huge key that was stressed over and over, and he and his family immediately set about improving theirs. Aaron had spent years in the Gym and more years pounding the pavements, and he reverted to those days, starting with 5 mile jogs, and then runs every evening as he became fitter. For the first week he couldn't complete the distance without stopping to walk some of it but that stage soon passed. All the time he passed neighbors and friends doing the same. As his former fitness returned he started running several miles in the mornings too. He remembered his years running at night, he'd viewed fitness as a saw tooth curve; every action caused a jump; every inaction a dive. Adding short morning jogs caused an instant increase in fitness and a big drop in total circuit times. The first times Barbara, Billy and Cassy joined him they similarly had to stop numerous times but they soon got into the spirit of things as a family. He was surprised how much weight he could still press at the Gym, and set out to improve as much as possible in the time they had left. Regardless of whether it was raining or clear, he ran the circuit after dark. He'd grown to like running in the rain when he was young, in summer it cooled him down and in winter it warmed him up.

At the same time he began scouting locations, starting with Maps of National Parks and Forests within a reasonable driving distance then narrowing the search with on line Aerial photos, after subtly excluding the two closest Forests from his search to make finding him that much harder. The entire USA was viewable on line on the Net, and he did so from an Internet Cafe. Never from home, he knew how traceable all data was. Police cases had been solved from on line city maps by listing the IP numbers which had viewed certain pages recently. The place he chose had to be near water, relatively accessible from the road but not too close to it either, not too rugged on the way there, and most importantly from the human perspective, it had to have a view of some sort.

After weeks of looking he settled on an uninhabited area some twenty miles away from the nearest road as well as several alternate locations nearby in case the first choice wasn't suitable for any reason. From the maps there was a gentle slope leading down to a stream, there were no mountains in the area, it wasn't geologically young country, and there weren't any large rivers or rapids to cross on the way there. The aerial photos showed almost solid forests everywhere with little scrubby country or swampland to mar progress, he hated swamps after unfortunate encounters with leeches when young and wanted to stay right away from those places. And he was careful to check for any kind of organization in the tree positions in the aerial photos, but they definitely hadn't been planted. The stream branched from a river miles away,

which was itself fed by melting Ice in the distant mountains. All good indications. It probably wouldn't be necessary to purify water but he wasn't taking any chances with Giardia either. Best of all, a 1950's era guide and map book he'd chanced upon was marked with old hunting trails following the easiest routes to remote corners of the park which few if any ever visited any more. Even if overgrown the markers might still be visible. He overlaid the best path and possible alternates on the modern maps and planned accordingly.

Two weeks later he took the first tentative steps toward their new lives. They drove out together two hundred miles into the countryside, past farmland and into rolling hills which changed abruptly to Forest as they entered the State Park. They entered along a disused maintenance and fire crew road, absolutely not the busy main visitors entrance and reception area. The gradual change of Government funding priorities were reflected even here he noted, the sealed side roads were overgrowing and disused staff huts and chalets could be glimpsed occasionally through the trees. He was mildly surprised they hadn't been repaired and occupied by families fleeing the cities, he'd briefly considered doing just that himself, apart from the fact their exact locations were also marked on the old trail guides. No, if what he was planning came to fruition they couldn't even touch any of those.

At a corner they stopped and unloaded the Car. A Tent, Chainsaw, Block and tackle to lift and move logs, a few broken-down gardening tools and all the Food he'd need were loaded into a backpack. A shovel and pickaxe were strapped to the back of the pack where they hopefully wouldn't hinder him. Several smaller bags were strapped to his chest to more evenly distribute the weight, around 40 kilos total on this trip. The maximum he'd determined he could comfortably carry over a long distance was about 60 kilos, but he'd decided it was prudent to keep the weight down on that first trip until he was more familiar with the territory. He rechecked the Maps and GPS one last time, then after hugging each family member in turn he strode alone into the Forest.

Well, this was it, he thought. Now it was all up to him. He'd many times done two to seven day treks along well defined tracks through National Parks; he'd learned some carpentry in the woodwork shop and even worked in the house building industry for a short time. The books said that Log Houses were the simplest permanent construction there were, you made the foundations, cut the logs to fit, scribed then notched and basically fitted them together, pulling them up a log ramp with the Block and tackle and rolling them into place. Brace the sides when you chainsaw the Doorway and window frames, put a vertical notch in the logs down the length of the hole then push a chunk of timber in for strength and support. The roofing was the only part that worried him, the shingles he'd have to make himself out there. That would be interesting. But it meant work, lots and lots of it, like he'd never done before.

The first days walking was slow and uneventful, he was constantly checking his position and course to make sure he didn't become lost or go in circles under the Forest canopy. He'd gone to the expense to buy a high quality robust, waterproof GPS hand held for each family member, sensitive units guaranteed not to use signals under Forest cover. Of course he'd also brought along a locator beacon in case of real emergency, but if he had to use that, it was over. The laminated maps were derived from Satellite data and about as accurate as could possibly be but finer details didn't make it onto them of course, things like the slope and heights by creeks, water speed and depth, sharp ridges and tree and scrub density. He had a machete for hacking a path if necessary but soon regretted it, there was only one small area where he had to find a way through climbers and rough scrub, the rest of the way was straight walking through heavily forested areas. The more tree canopy there

was, the less undergrowth there was he noted. All the time he was watching for signs that others might be in the area, marked trails, smoke or signs of regenerating Forest, but a hundred meters away from the roads the thinly tree covered area turned into full Forest coverage that remained more or less constant all the way there. He might as well have been walking on the moon, the territory appeared so vacant.

As expected there were few sharp ridges and steep inclines, but there were plenty of places to give him pause. At several points he came to spring-fed creeks which were little more than a trickle, but over millennia had worn deep slippery moss-coated gullies in rock. At those places he searched around looking for easier and safer crossings, and upon finding none used what was on hand. He selected a well positioned tree with lots of branches and fell it across the gap to make an instant bridge, then added the location to the GPS data. At another point he came to a steep slope with no apparent way around, and paused to spend several hours digging steps up the face.

At the end of the first day he found himself by a small stream and set up camp. Looking carefully, he spotted Trout swimming among the Rocks. According to the GPS he was only ten miles from the chosen location now. He took a note of the location; it was a bit far for his liking but it was still a fishing spot to consider. It was a good stopover point on the way though.

He was expecting it to take 2 days to reach the chosen area; it took closer to 3 because he took his time and constantly checked and rechecked to make sure he stayed on course in the complete wilderness. Nerves, he thought... When everything indicated he'd reached the right hillside area he searched around and soon located the perfect location to build on. Apart from the all-important view, there had to be plenty of tall thinner trees around and the slope had to be gentle so it was possible to haul logs uphill if need be using the block and tackle. He dropped everything and explored the area thoroughly for unpleasant surprises like unstable slopes, cliffs or swampland. The stream was about half a mile below, in between was an ideally situated almost flat area which looked perfect for gardening. He climbed a nearby ridge to check the view as it would be once he'd thinned the trees, and immediately made his decision; Home was right here. the sunlight would burst through the valley each morning to illuminate the forest in a blaze of green. They'd have been happy if all he'd done on this trip was scout each of the potential sites marked on the maps and photographed them for the family to choose from, anything beyond that was a bonus. They were going to love this place.

Then the work began. He dug the base of the house out over several days then began selecting and cutting the required 8 to 10 inch diameter trees, making sure to choose only the taller trees so there'd be little tapering. He also took care not to clear-fell the area around the house; that would stand out like a sore thumb during an aerial survey, or worse, an intentional search. And he mainly selected downward trees in order to create a view even though it meant even more work. He chainsawed off the limbs and tops then cut them to length, using the limbs as rollers as he hauled them into place. Then came the really hard work; measuring, sawing then manually shaping the notches into them for both the exterior fitting and interior partitioning, cutting the vees along the full length of the log to reduce fraughts and finally hauling them into position up a pair of logs ramped against the side. The proper way of doing it was to strip the bark off the logs first then dry them for years beforehand, there wasn't time for either, it would sharply reduce the lifespan of the house but it had to suffice. The real experts at this also shaped the logs to fit snugly, taking months of nonstop effort to build a house. The construction slowly began to rise layer by layer, and the remaining gaps between the logs were caulked with mud and sawdust.

He didn't even consider flooring at that point, carrying in bags of cement would be a huge job he'd quickly decided to forego. Mats by the beds and table would have to suffice for now, he hoped Barbara wouldn't mind. There'd be months between the roof going up and their moving in so the ground would have long dried solid. When there was time he'd lay down wooden slats for flooring.

Nine days after arriving he'd not even reached knee height when it came time to start on the gardens by the river. That was an absolutely critical priority. You didn't need a big area just to support a family, but eventually it'd be larger than necessary in case of unforeseen circumstances. Anything was possible, like crop failure or flooding, and he wanted extra to be sure. For that reason he also placed it a fair distance above the river, everyone knew about hundred year floods. That was the only time he intended risking clear-felling a small area, he'd also make the clearing teardrop-shaped instead of round or square so from above it'd look like a natural slippage unless someone looked closer. On that first trip he settled for clearing a small area to start with, cutting the logs to length for future use and moving them aside, leaving the crowns of the trees piled at the lowest end of the Garden. The more work he did, the more presented itself, he could only prioritize. Digging the stumps out was a big job in itself, he did several on that trip but saved the rest for later, planting had to begin immediately. He had to reduce his own dependence on imported food in the meantime as well as test the local soil conditions. When they set a date for leaving he'd plant in advance for the entire family. After digging and tilling the soil to break it up he planted the first of the summer vegetables. When eventually finished he intended to have a variety of species as well as vegetable types. Disease resistant as well as normal ones to find out more about the local conditions. And he also reserved an area for garlic and common spices to add variety. Fruit was the problematic thing, apple and orange trees took years before they began to produce so he intended to bring out a large amount of Vitamin and Mineral supplements on future trips. Rabbit proof fencing and lots of seedlings were at the very top of the list of things to come out on the next trip. Solid wooden fencing made from the tree limbs would be added shortly thereafter to keep out larger pests like Goats and Deer. The Children were preparing the seedlings already, especially Cassy; she'd acquired a knack for propagation. They'd quickly worked out for themselves the reason for the sudden books and the backyard gardens all around the neighborhood, and were of course sworn to secrecy.

On the 12th day he rested in preparation for the return trip through the Forest. He was damned sure he'd lost weight through both sweat and labor in the last two weeks. The effort he'd put in just to do that much was unbelievable, and that was with the aid of modern equipment. The Forest gives up nothing without a struggle, he thought. He had a new respect for the first Pioneers who had only the very basics; they'd cleared and settled vast tracts of America by absolute pure brute strength. They must've been up there with supermen for strength, endurance and sheer bloody-minded determination to succeed in the unforgiving endless wilderness which existed then. Which, of course, made one wonder about the conditions in Europe they were escaping that made them that way. He was reminded of the saying about the early sailors, "When ships were wood and men were iron". And they'd almost been forgotten in history, you had to look hard to find anything about them and their stories nowadays. Everyone should spend a few months out here he thought, it taught humility and a whole different set of values and standards. He gave himself a days rest to regain strength, eat and regain lost fluids before beginning the long trek back. Thank goodness he didn't have to take the tools back; he was sore and tired enough as it was. They and the excess food stayed out there.

Something that amazed him about the return trip was that he was only a short distance off the path he'd followed to get there, but the whole countryside looked completely different. He easily saw how people could get lost out here, even a hundred yards was enough if they didn't know the area, maybe less. One grove of trees looked just like another.

He'd underestimated how tired he'd be and barely made the rendezvous point with half an hour to spare. He was absolutely worn out from work and walking but things were well underway, the description of the house was the one thing he was deliberately vague about, he was keeping it a surprise for them. That first trip also showed all the deficiencies in knowledge and equipment he'd need on future trips out there. All good for the future. He did bring back a few Digital Camera photos of part of the work to allay Barbara's fears, which he refused to offload to the lounge computer and deleted instead after she and the kids had viewed them.

Back in the city, almost regrettably he thought, he turned his thoughts to the other project which had begun to consume his thoughts. He'd begun it a year before, slowly at first, then with more certainty. He went through the coding of all the famous viruses which he'd stored years before from on line archives; Melissa, Back Orifice, Dark Avenger, Anna Kournikova, Chernobyl, IloveYou, Blaster, SoBig, Nimda, Slammer, MyDoom, Sasser, developing little by little the outline then the code for something far, far worse.

Some of the work just entailed cutting and pasting useful code from past viruses and modifying as necessary, but most of it would be unique. The biggest and best of the past viruses had about 2000 lines of code, just from the distribution coding alone this would be much bigger. Attempting to have it download code from another site was absolutely out of the question, it had to be all-inclusive in one. He rechecked the stored virus guides one more time, flexed his fingers then started typing.

"What are you doing back there on that old machine?", Barbara asked him one evening a week later when she'd seen him at work on it without a pause since straight after Dinner for one evening too many for her liking, he was uncharacteristically even avoiding the kids and had become a bit too much of a fixture in that back room of late.

"Never you mind!", he'd snapped.

She'd be curious, he knew her well enough, but she also knew better than to probe further. She also knew him well enough that he never did anything without a reason. Theirs was more than a trusting relationship, but he wasn't letting her or anyone else into this unless absolutely necessary.

He thought back to the time the rumor had gone around at her work that she was having an affair. Upon hearing about it, he'd simply replied "Oh yeah, right", and didn't even bother questioning her about it. And that was that. Their relationship had been strengthened by that event.

Every month he repeated the trip into the Forest, working, building and learning all the time, and many of their neighbors were doing the same. Billy wanted to come out there with him, as much to break the monotony as to help, but as much as he appreciated the offer from his son he had to refuse. Billy's job was to help and protect if necessary his Mother and Sister while he was away.

Rain or shine, he cut and dragged logs. He couldn't afford idle days off in the tent; the gangs wouldn't wait to occupy their area either. He had to take the good with the bad and force himself onward regardless. All that training at night when he was young came in handy now; the rain even helped, it cooled him down and the logs appeared to slide more easily. He recalled the texts stating that winter was the best time to build, the snow acted the same way. They were too far south for snow to be a concern, for which he was grateful. Winter storage wasn't something he was in a position to consider. It was early spring now and the cooler temperatures were a bonus, he'd have loathed building in the summer heat.

The more he progressed, the further he was forced to search for suitable trees. He found a grove several hundred meters around the hill and down in a steep hollow which he suspected was the site of an ancient slip, they all appeared the same age and width and just right for the job, it was as though they'd been waiting especially for him. But even the block and tackle wouldn't move cut logs up that slope, so the next time he brought out a winch handle and steel cable to slowly drag them up. Layer by layer their new house rose out there as he dragged suitable logs into place with levers and the block and tackle till at last he was satisfied and hauled up a pair of several meters longer logs to overhang at the front then began on the roofing.

The window frames and heavy Perspex sheets were among the few pre-assembled parts he took out. He wanted lots of light inside, but had to settle for a compromise with weight and room in the backpack for the dismantled parts. At times like this he wished he could've hired a Helicopter and pilot to bring everything in on one trip, but that was absolutely out of the question. Cutting the doorway and window frames was the job he'd been dreading from day one, he'd done everything exactly as instructed, made sure the sides were firmly braced and prepared timbers to slot into place as soon as everything was cut, checked and rechecked the measurements and ensured everything was securely in place, but couldn't escape visions of months of work falling down around him, or worse, on top of him, as he began sawing. Nothing moved as the log segments dropped out, and he cut the vertical notches into the cut edges and hammered the supports into place without any problem.

The roofing slats themselves were made from one of the full-size trees he'd reluctantly had to bring down to make room for the gardens. His teachers at school had commented on how he had an eye for straight lines, and he proved it again by drawing half inch segments with chalk then chainsawing and squaring them off, painstakingly chipping and planing each to sit firmly. Between them and the roof framing was the only plastic sheeting he used in its construction, to ensure any water which penetrated didn't fall inside. As everything started coming together he was pleasantly surprised to find the house was very warm and insulated from temperature changes once he plugged a few small overlooked gaps between the logs.

Physically and psychologically preparing the rest of the family was another vital part of the preparations. They visited a camping and outdoor pursuits

store and Aaron outfitted them with Thermal clothing, waterproof insulated sleeping bags rated to far below zero, and Teflon coated over-trousers and jackets. If they could handle 60 mile an hour wind and driving rain on boats and on motorcycles and still keep the wearer dry, they would handle about the worst the Forest could throw at them. He also arranged for their immunizations to be brought up to date, particularly Tetanus, Tuberculosis and Meningococcal disease. They managed to keep that part quiet from the kids until they arrived at the Doctors and saw the needles waiting for them. Both Cassy and Billy really hated injections.

As well as a first aid kit with the usual items, he also wanted some more specialized drugs in case of emergency. He was considering looking on the black market but didn't need to in the end, one of their neighbors who was similarly planning to leave was a Doctor who was quietly collaborating with people to help them obtain restricted items like syringes, painkillers and antibiotics, and took his time explaining how to correctly use them if needed. Ampoule's of Penicillin and Pethidine joined peoples kits as a result.

In between his working trips the family began spending a lot of time together camping, starting at camping grounds then progressing to a short way into the wilderness, partly to get them away from the stress around their home but mainly getting them used to living outside of the urban comfort zone and preparing for their new lives away from the city. They mainly kept to clear and dry weather, as much as he'd have liked to bring them out camping during stormy weather as a confidence exercise he didn't think they'd appreciate it. Billy was the only one who shared his enthusiasm for jogging in the rain, and both Barbara and Cassy teased them for that.

Aaron taught them all the basic survival skills in detail, among them orienteering, reading maps, and the correct use of a GPS unit. He told them that the Forest was their friend, not their enemy; it only required more knowledge and preparation. You didn't need to be a University professor to live out there he said to them, but the more little tricks and tips you knew, the more comfortable you'd be. He'd made numerous little purchases over the past few months for contingency use, among them were Misch metal spark generators for fires and small magnifying glasses, and of course they practiced the tried and true string and bow fire making technique. Making a fire in the wet was a sign of a true bushman he explained, cutting out dry wood first if need be. He strongly encouraged them to make and keep little kits for whenever they went out exploring, containing one of the small tents, dry grass and a few sticks for emergency use, repellents and mosquito netting; they wouldn't weigh much or take up much room, but could save them a whole lot of trouble. Making shelters using leaves and natural ropes was another thing he showed them in detail in case of emergency. He encouraged the kids in particular to get into the habit of watching around them and spotting useful things and natural shelters wherever they went. Another important tip he gave them was to examine the ground before they set up tent or shelter; on hillsides in particular to look for places devoid of fallen leaves, hollows, patches of bent grass and signs of rain channels, because that's where the water flowed when it rained.

During one of these trips Barbara confided in him away from the kids that she didn't know if she was looking forward to becoming a country woman. He told her that safety, gardening and food were the big concerns, the rest he was teaching as backup. All you need is to know what to do and when to do it, he said to her, and from what he'd seen her doing in the gardens at home she'd be fine. That seemed to help make her feel better.

They all commented after the first few trips on how clear and fresh the air

was away from the city. He replied that if they liked it there just off the beaten track, they were going to love it at their new home.

Stevie was the one person he'd entrusted with the location of their new home. Coincidentally he and five other families from their neighborhood had chosen the same Forest for similar reasons, they'd elected to work together to help each other and to learn from common mistakes, but they'd selected a site much closer to the road. Aaron had misgivings about Stevie's chosen area, but he was happy there so who was he to argue the point? After the natural initial unease they too were starting to prefer it away from the city, there they were absolutely in control of their destiny, there was no substitute for preparation and initiative. Stevie had already shifted several family members who'd been boarding with him to the new house he'd finished with their help, and Aaron knew several neighbors had done the same.

One night Stevie, Aaron and a few others went out for drinks and they were chatting about common experiences. He had to admire them; at least they'd remain close neighbors as well as friends. There were a builder and a carpenter among their little group, so the men who weren't sure how to proceed were helped by those who were. Even if they didn't have knowledge, they had very welcome manpower. It was an amazing sight, all those men and a few women working together to drag cut logs over uneven country for hundreds of meters and even kilometers while a few boys among their group ran to move the rollers from the back to the front as they fell out. Aaron winced to think of himself slowly dragging them by himself using levers and the block and tackle, toward the end it'd often taken a day or more to get each to the chosen site as the distances grew. In between the lot of them, once they had the materials accumulated, logs cut and prepped, they could have a complete cabin up in a few days. They'd quickly built one then used that as home base for the tradesmen among them to work full time, and the rest provided materials, food and their labor each time they rejoined their friends. Each time a home went up, another group left to live and work full time there. It was blessed relief for a man to know his family was safe away from the urban jungle; he then only had to bring in food while the common gardens were established. The cabins were built a hundred meters apart, no bunching up and lots of privacy, and all still under cover of the forest canopy. You'd have to look closely to see them if you didn't know they were there, the only part that was by necessity exposed were the common gardens built in a patch of regenerating Forest that appeared to have burned years before.

There were broad hints from several around the table that Aaron should drop his plans way out there and come and live with them, he'd love it there, especially considering it was him who'd suggested the idea in the first place. They had a nice site marked out for him, they'd gladly help him build and would even help him move the things he'd already taken all the way out there. Aaron demurred, and couldn't look them in the eye as he quietly declined.

Stevie looked confused, and asked the question Aaron had been dreading and hoping wouldn't be asked.

"Do you know something we don't?"

Meantime, the no-go areas slowly expanded toward their area. The once peaceful nights had begun to echo with distant gunfire, just like an approaching war zone. The gunfire started sporadically around 4pm each afternoon, the automatic gunfire around 6pm. Occasionally a spent bullet fired skyward would strike a roof nearby, making people flinch at the sound.

They'd stood there on the veranda one evening where previously they'd sipped

drinks at the end of a days work and held hands and watched the Children play. Now there were distant popping sounds, the occasional burst of machine gun fire muffled by distance, and every now and then an explosion and loud cheers audible even from that distance. They stood in silence, listening to the metallic fireworks. No gun controls whatsoever there, it was widely believed that weapons and ammunition were just as freely smuggled across the border as illegal immigrants, and there was little reason to doubt that.

"We don't have long", he stated blankly.

"No, we don't", Barbara echoed.

Burglaries and crime shot up as strange figures wandered around at night. People were stopped and stood over for "Spare money"; refusing or even acting too slowly for their liking caused an explosion of rage and racial hatred. Women and Girls, even 10 and 12 year olds, were openly harassed for sex. People stood near stop signs and traffic lights, tried doors to see if they were unlocked or simply pointed guns through the windows of any Car which stopped near them. Children were shoved off Bikes and robbed. 7 year olds and 80 year olds alike were followed, punched to the ground and kicked by gangs of youths and able bodied men. Bags and Shopping were snatched from behind by laughing Gang members. Groups wandered around glaring at passerby, sometimes repeatedly shoving their angry faces inches from yours while their friends watched, or deliberately bumping into passerby then demanding "What'd you do that for?", anything to try and get the slightest response to 'justify' an attack. Making even fleeting eye contact with them caused an explosion of rage, usually accompanied by racial epithets, after which their friends often high fived them, patted them on the shoulder and laughed out loud. Even smiling anywhere near them was enough to make them storm up and demand "Are you being Smart?", A favorite trick was to stand by doorways almost blocking the way so you had to brush past them to get in or out; touching them was sufficient 'excuse' for a violent attack, even politely asking to get past them caused an instant punch to the face. Another favorite was to deliberately walk into the path of Whites so they had to step off the pavement to avoid a collision. And the feral children joined in the fun, slowly and barely getting out of the way and glaring at you with hate when you drove past them. Everyone knew the message; you weren't fit to use the same sidewalk or road as these people. Yet another favorite was to insult or punch you or your partner as you walked past in the hope of getting the slightest response, even asking "What did you say?" was enough 'excuse' to be beaten almost to death. Or if no 'excuse' was forthcoming, they'd just as likely smash you with fists, feet and Iron bars just for the fun of it, then claim you'd insulted them or tried to pick up one of their girlfriends. If someone actually dared to throw these people out of a nightclub, cinema or other building or worse, beat them up for their outrageous behavior, they and their friends would either return with guns to get revenge for the 'slight', else they'd spend days attacking every White person they spotted. Which, when he thought about it, was identical behavior to the '93 riots, just on a smaller scale. People began losing count of who'd been attacked; Aaron himself had stopped before a suspicious group hanging around near traffic lights at night and had to step on the accelerator when they ran toward him. In just a couple of months exercising at night had become out of the question, which just left casual workouts at the gym to increase their fitness.

And they weren't anywhere near the Ghetto itself. Aaron shuddered to think how bad it must be in those places. All they knew was that since the "profiling" word had gained popularity among the civil rights crowd, the murder rate had gone through the roof in those areas without active policing, and if anyone saw a piece of property they liked, they just took it, and if

they saw a woman they liked, they took her. Nothing was said in the media any more about those places, giving people the false impression that things were improving and that it was just the Gang members in their area that were bad. It had to be worse than hell without the slightest sign of law enforcement. They were only seeing the very start of it.

Early one morning he diverted from shopping to show Cassie and Billy some of the things the media made sure to shield people from seeing until it was too late. He checked the mechanics of the Car were sound, put both pistols into the glove box as protection then intentionally drove into a Gang destroyed area, pointing out the people even at that time in the morning standing around 24 hour liquor stores or waiting near shops and ATMs for victims, the rubbish scattered everywhere, feces and graffiti littered doorways and walkways, the burned and boarded-up buildings, and he let the kids make up their own minds about the occupants of the area.

They stopped outside the ruins of a high-rise 300 unit apartment building with a sign on it stating it was due for demolition, and he told them the story of the place, related to him by a friend on one of the repair crews which tried and failed to keep up with the destructiveness of the tenants, who'd immediately set about turning the place into a urinal and defecated on the floors and even on the walls and used the curtains as toilet paper. The lifts soon stopped working, short-circuited because the tenants liked to urinate in them between floors. Not even animals defecate where they sleep, he pointed out. The repairmen went floor by floor removing accumulated rubbish, painting walls, repairing electric circuits and holes, but by the time they'd reached the third floor the first would have reverted to the state it'd been in. The building was full of cockroaches because the residents had such filthy habits, and total infestation of apartments wasn't unusual. There wasn't a single employed person living in the building, not one, and few left their apartments before the early afternoon unless it was welfare day, and then they were up early shopping, down at the welfare office, or trying to swap food stamps for cash or drugs. The Police were constantly visiting because of the activities of the tenants and police helicopters often hovered overhead tracking suspects. The copper roofing was repeatedly ripped off for scrap metal by the same tenants who then complained the interior was exposed to the elements, and in the end it had deteriorated so much it was ordered abandoned by safety and health inspectors. When the tenants had been removed to better accommodations for them to destroy once more, workers checking the building before the place was sealed up for good found several apartments with rooms entirely filled from floor to ceiling with rotting garbage, with only the bedding visible above the piles of filth. This and the other buildings in the area were built to last and with care would have remained usable for hundreds of years, but had lasted less than five because the Black inhabitants treated housing as a throwaway item that would be replaced by the city without cost to them. After things like this had happened enough times, the city council quietly decided to build low income units using only stark drab concrete so they wouldn't be so easily destroyed. With privately leased apartments, tenants who damaged the property were evicted and held fully accountable for the cost, but the city never did anything to recoup the destructiveness of the welfare inhabitants in Black areas then wondered why they repeated the process in every place they were moved into.

"It's poverty that makes people do that", Cassy protested.

So he told them how during the depressions of the past the people kept their places neat and orderly, they helped out each other to keep them in one piece as well as planting vegetables to survive. And that was with absolutely no welfare at all. They might have been poor, but they had enough pride in

themselves to refuse to live in filth. Poverty has always been what you make of it.

"And that was TRUE poverty back then, not the fake poverty these people live in. Remember, this happened despite every single person in that building living there on free or reduced rent, extensive welfare and subsidies of every kind. No amount of money does anything to help people who'd rather smash a toilet and the walls around it than flush it. And the only plants they grew here were marijuana. So, whets these peoples excuse?", he asked Cassy.

She didn't reply.

He showed them a Restaurant in the former Italian part of town, now a burned and half collapsed brick outline with only the blackened sign and the metal frames of several tables poking above the rubble, and he told them about the good times they had with the staff who worked there and the special meals they used to make for their repeat customers. He and their Mother had their first ever Dinner date there all those years before while they were still in school, the shy 17 year old Aaron and more confident but reserved 19 year old Barbara. Even back then he'd preferred older women, and considered himself extremely lucky to win a date with Barbara. He recalled how they'd both arrived determined to put up fronts to hide how nervous they were, but by the end of that first evening they were hand in hand talking and laughing like old friends. They'd fallen in love there and continued to dine every Thursday night at the same reserved table until the area became a no-go zone.

Aaron knew it was getting to them after he deliberately drove slowly through a street where every one of the few people out at that time of morning stopped in their tracks and stared at the Whites intruding in their midst.

"Who's putting out the hate here?", he casually remarked to the kids, "All we're doing is driving past them, and look at their facial expressions."

"Why don't they like to be looked at?", Cassy asked.

"That's because it's considered by wild animals to be a challenge, its behavior straight out of the jungle. It's also wild animal behavior to declare some place to be 'their' territory and attack anyone from outside their group who enters. And that's otherwise known as tribal or gang warfare."

"That's racist, Dad!", she gasped in disbelief.

"We're not racist, they are! Didn't you hear the things they said about us at school?", Billy snapped back at her.

"Thank you for the compliment, Cassy. I prefer 'realist' myself, it's much more accurate", Aaron replied. "Look at the usage of that word, all 'racist' means is that you've noticed their violent behavior and avoid them for that reason. And when you hear the media say 'Nazi', all it means is that people have actually commented on it."

He told them the saying about the Shark approaching the Swimmers. Would they obey their instincts and leave the water, or would they call themselves 'Sharkophobes' and remain there in the hope it mightn't be one of those that attacked Swimmers? Above all, what their experiences in school told them to do, he asked.

"These people constantly complain about the slightest perceived instance of racism, but what do you think would happen to any White walking through these

places at night?", he commented.

"Dad, differences are only skin deep!", Cassy protested once more.

"Indeed?", he replied.

Crime was the result of inherited nature or nurture ran the arguments. The latter was the invariably selected answer in these politically correct times. He told the kids to decide on that for themselves, after pointing out that when a third of a segment of society's entire population spend time in prison at some point during their lifetime, over half are charged with a serious felony at least once during their lives, and a third are in prison, on parole, under probation or other forms of judicial custody at any one time, then somethings really wrong with them, not the rest of society like they tried to say, and those were just the ones who'd been caught. Over half of all deaths among the Black teen to early adult age group happened because they explode with murderous violence if annoyed and can't even get along with each other, let alone others. Statistics showed that crime rates are more accurately predicted by the racial makeup of that city than by any other factor, including all socio-economic factors. The media liked to say that poverty causes violence, while forgetting to mention that during the great depressions of the past there was no welfare whatsoever but crime was only a tiny fraction of what it was here; the common factor in every bad area was the number of Black inhabitants. For every Black in University, there were two in prison. Even those who'd succeeded in soccer, football, business or politics had a far higher rate of offending, and the same was still true even when they'd been adopted and brought up by a loving family of Whites. No matter what they say, some animals can't be trained.

"DAD!", Cassy protested loudly once more.

"You're just saying that to annoy her, aren't you Dad?", Billy said in between Cassy's protests and his own chuckling at her reactions.

"Of course I am", he grinned, before continuing their drive through the area.

He heard a sharp intake of breath from the kids when they drove past a human being with the unmistakable pallor of death laying face down in the open in a debris strewn yard, surrounded by dried blood, cared for by nobody. What they pretended to show in TV programs was one thing; this was the real thing, right in front of them.

He told them to learn it now and learn it well; White societies are the only ones which value life and display empathy for victims. If you weren't immediate family, few cared if you lived or died, unless an outsider was responsible, then its open warfare. In the constant TV footage of African famines they always showed the concerned aid worker picking up a crying baby abandoned by the side of road, but were careful never to show the tens of thousands of people walking past and completely ignoring the baby. It was exactly the same here; even in majority Black areas, the firemen and ambulance people were largely White, it just wasn't part of their overall nature to help others. Even Blacks commented that Blacks rarely contributed toward starving people.

The same attitude extended toward crime victims, he said to them. In these places, a felony conviction earns prestige and was valued more than a college education, which often meant the unfortunate owner was regarded as trying to be White. If something bad happens to people in areas like the one they were in, often the very worst thing they can do is call the police, because if they

thought they had it bad before, it was hell afterward once word got around. People here supported the criminals, not their victims, absolutely regardless of how atrocious their crimes were. They considered convicted criminals to be political prisoners and held parties to celebrate the release of murderers and child molesters from prison. They rarely accept responsibility for their own behavior that led to their conviction, far more often they'll try to minimize what they've done or justify it because somehow the victim deserved it or had brought it upon themselves. And whenever anything bad happened, you never saw Black community leaders castigating the criminals. White people don't make excuses for white criminals, defending and making excuses for criminals was something only Blacks did.

He drove just far enough into the area to visit a former shopping block not far from the completely vacant dead zone and slowed long enough for the kids to take in the massive steel shutters over the doors and barred windows all the way up to the third floor. They'd been stolen broke by both locally hired employees and customers alike, by outright theft, robbery, fraud, overdrawn personal cheques and burglary, forcing them to take up ever increasing amounts of store security until they couldn't take any more and closed for good. A favorite trick used here was for people to buy big meat packs and eat half, leave the rest to go off then bring back the remainder and demand a replacement or refund, and the same people did it week after week. The people in these areas always blamed racism for the businesses closing and moving elsewhere and even sued for them to remain, but the fact was that if there was money to be made they'd stay right where they were.

"At least zoo animals know not to bite the hand that feeds or pollute their own food and water, these people don't care. They don't think in the long term, they use up everything around them then move on; they just want instant gratification, regardless of consequence, whereas White people think of the result of their actions. Well, you're looking at the consequences", he remarked.

"Dad, inside we're all equal!", Cassy protested.

"There's no equality anywhere in Nature, Cass. That's the trap you've fallen into. Every species and subspecies has its differences in behavior. I'm only pointing them out to you."

Beyond the shopping center was the dead zone, which Aaron didn't feel like entering. The further they'd gone, the worse the condition of the buildings until some were literally piles of rubble surrounded by enormous fields of trash. Everything that couldn't be stolen had been destroyed by the former inhabitants, and some were now trash-filled vacant lots after demolition by the city in an apparent effort to remove the evidence of what the inhabitants had done to them. He mentioned how even from the air you can see where the Blacks lived because their areas looked exactly like a war zone. At night the difference was even more dramatic from the air, there were few working lights and small fires were everywhere in these places. And all over the world it was the same, the White man built a city, then the Black man tore it down and asked for new housing, more Federal funding and higher welfare payments as the solution to the problems they'd caused.

"Have you noticed how in all the nature programs you see animals catching their food or trying to steal it from others straight after they've caught it? Stealing is just another way of life in the jungle. These people fight each other over the spoils the same way. Another is attacking in wolf-packs like you saw in school. Remember how they liked to distract or surround people while one comes up from behind or from the side? Those are hunting tactics.

One on one is a fight, six on one is hatred."

"That doesn't mean that they can't be changed", said Cassy.

"There's been 50 years of reform and things have only gotten worse, Cass. At school they told you that people only need to be given a chance. Well, they've now had 50 years of chances, and Black SAT scores have actually dropped in that time. Everyone chooses their lifestyle through their own choices, they can tidy their houses and properties and get an education for free, they can call the Police to stop the criminals, and they can call the councils to tidy up their neighborhoods. They've done none of that."

"That's because the police were always picking on them", said Cassy.

Aaron was slowing the Car again.

"If you like, we can stop here and ask these people who're staring at us if they've been picked on by the Police or if they just hate us."

"NO!", they shouted in unison.

Do you know why the signs at National parks warn you not to feed the Bears, he asked them to think about? It's because feeding them doesn't make them like you and treat you nicer, instead it makes them aggressive and much more likely to attack you because they believe you're a source of food they're entitled to. That's why these people explode with rage when they don't get something they want, such as when a request for 'spare money' is refused, when they're declined a Welfare payment or if they fail a credit check at a store, and it's why if you try to stop them committing a crime in progress, they will kill you. People who take thirteen times more just in social services than what they contribute in taxes can't really be counted as productive, culturally enriching members of society, he pointed out. And that wasn't even including the cost of their criminal and irresponsible behavior. If not for the cost of maintaining these lifestyles, we'd probably have colonies on the Moon and on Mars, he suggested. That got a startled reaction; their schooling had done its best to discourage them from thinking beyond what they'd been taught.

He told them how Africa and South America are probably the richest continents in natural resources but are home to the worlds poorest people. On the other hand, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and England are poor in natural resources, but their people are among the worlds richest. Their teachers had told them that the legacy of colonialism completely explained Third World poverty, while conveniently neglecting to say that the very poorest countries like Ethiopia and Liberia were never colonies. At school they'd been taught that the native peoples were suffering purely from the theft of their land and discriminatory policies by colonists, but their teachers never told them that after they'd driven off the White farmers who were feeding them, their suffering was immeasurably worse. Everywhere from Africa to America, the Blacks bit the hands that fed them but never learned from it, and neither did Western governments. Apartheid never killed as many Africans as were dying right now from deliberate neglect by their own leaders, he pointed out. While their populations had in many cases doubled since independence, at the same time both their life expectancy and yearly incomes had dropped by half. Their teachers had also quietly omitted to tell them that every attempt to help with farms, roads, bridges, hospitals and schools had completely broken down within a short period of time. Just like in American cities, they consistently destroyed the infrastructure and even the agriculture, using force if need be to carry out the destruction, and then called for aid. Even formerly

prosperous countries like Haiti, Rhodesia and South Africa had been quickly turned into third world cesspits by their new rulers. Haiti had its infrastructure rebuilt numerous times by America just in the last century but had entirely collapsed every time. And every year the UN celebrated the end of slavery in Haiti, but never mentioned the unmitigated hell that country had been ever since.

What's the common factor in all these countries, he asked them to consider.

"The occupants", Billy replied.

People have been feeding themselves since long before the Stone Age, he pointed out. The Canadians manage to feed themselves with a short growing season in their wintery climate, but in the central African countries they're starving despite being in a veritable Garden of Eden with sunshine and rain almost all year round. Western governments should be asking why these people are always fleeing from places they control instead of inviting them in as refugees.

For that matter, the Government and humanitarian groups had never asked the consent of the American public for people who lived in violent filth strewn refugee camps in countries which had been destroyed by its own population to be allowed into the US to supposedly improve their lot. Governments and media alike bemoaned the lot of these people and how unfortunate they were, but carefully avoided showing the reality of Aid workers surrounded by heavily armed guards as they handed out sacks of food, then retreating as they ran out because the people they were helping promptly turned around and began throwing rocks and pulling knives and getting ready to attack them, as kindness is considered to be weakness in those countries. It shouldn't have been a surprise when those same immigrants promptly created violent, filth strewn neighborhoods for themselves to live in. Some of the new arrivals quickly ended up in state prisons for committing violent crimes, while others survived by fraud and by peddling drugs and food stamps as well as welfare, with some refusing to even so much as learn to read or write. The controlled media in turn made sure that only those few who succeeded in their new country made it into the news, never those who didn't and especially not the majority who openly supported criminal behavior.

"Some people just aren't suited for human civilization" he commented, to the loudest protests yet from Cassy.

And that was just a minor example of how our supposed government protectors had allowed in people whose aim in life wasn't to assimilate into and contribute toward society, as everyone was fully expected to do in their own country of origin, but instead to ruin everyone else's lives. These people regarded it as a right to live in America, not the instantly and permanently revocable privilege it should have been. An extreme example was the Sept 11 aircraft hijackers, who could and should have been stopped from ever entering the country. Every other country believed in people fitting in, some had notoriously tough language and history tests before citizenship was granted. America, and every other country, had absolutely no use whatsoever for anyone who didn't fit in. Was it the strength or the weakness of the West that we allowed incompatible elements who'd almost immediately gained criminal records to stay in our countries, and gave citizenship to people who couldn't even speak the language, he asked them to consider.

They left the area before too many people woke up, then he drove into the central city for food at a wholly Black staffed fast food outlet. There was

another lesson waiting here for Billy and Cassy, and he bade them watch the staff closely as they served the Black customers, then the White family further down the queue. With the Black customers, there were universal smiles and often free food given with the comment "Extra for you, Bro". When the White family reached the head of the queue, the smiles disappeared. The person at the counter didn't even speak to them, so the Father simply placed their order. No words were spoken to them at any point until the very end, when their order was slapped down in front of them along with several others.

"That's yours", the cashier snapped at them then turned away.

"Is that ours?", the father asked, unsure which he'd meant.

"No, THAT'S yours!", the cashier almost shouted at them before storming off, while the Black customers behind them chuckled.

"Do you feel like eating here?", Aaron asked his kids after they'd watched the display of naked aggression. They replied strongly to the negative, so they left and ate at an Italian pizza restaurant instead.

He then took them to a courthouse where they spent the afternoon in various courtrooms watching testimony of the indescribable horrors gang members inflicted on each other and Whites in particular. They watched firsthand the accounts of people who were little more than humanoids without a shred of conscience, while their uncontrolled kids ran wild outside the courtrooms intimidating people, tearing down and dragging around wall furnishings, constantly pulling on barriers, ropes and poles, and looting the vending machines in full view of everyone. A trial that got to them was a young thug who'd been friendly with a White for years while stealing small objects of value from his home, then when caught had instantly pulled a knife and stabbed his supposed friend almost to death, which suggested he'd been prepared in case that happened someday. Cassy almost cried as she watched a young woman testifying of being gang raped by her own brothers as part of a gang initiation rite. In another courtroom was the ongoing retrial of a Black who'd caused a car crash while speeding and drink driving, then at the hospital demanded to be treated ahead of the others waiting there. Only the Mother managed to free herself from the car he'd hit before it burst into flames, burning her Husband and Children to death while she could only watch. The case was being retried because two Black jurors had refused to convict their own people on the most serious charges absolutely regardless of the evidence presented.

"Do you still think all life is equal and has value?", he casually asked Cassy later. Shaken, she didn't reply.

Outside a courtroom, Billy chatted with a Police officer, and asked him "Why haven't we heard about any of these cases in the news?"

The Officer flinched, ducked the question and walked away.

Billy had just learned his first lesson in the prevailing moral censorship.

There were many subtle ways of hiding the truth; for decades the media had completely omitted cases which made Blacks look bad, or selectively reported them with the worst details left out, hidden the fact that the perpetrator was Black, or they didn't print the victims and perpetrators photos together in the same article. The police often helped by quietly dropping some charges so the worst details of cases didn't come out. But regardless, all such cases quickly faded from the limelight. Anyone visiting the courtrooms or Black

areas could see the full facts for themselves.

On the way home that afternoon they passed a mayoral candidates campaign billboard with the slogan "Diversity is our strength". Orwell's "Ignorance is Strength" was a more apt form of that slogan, Aaron thought. He could read the look of discomfort on Cassy's face in the rear mirror as she stared at the sign. After what she'd seen for herself that day she was thinking hard about the things she'd learned in school. The school system taught that racism was the product of generations old baseless prejudices that would end with an enlightened population and future prosperity for all. The reality was a hate-filled Technicolor nightmare; the supposed Black victims of White society were vicious savages who created racism wherever they went, and Diversity was just a polite term for ethnic cleansing of Whites. Blacks only used that word when they didn't have a foothold in a profession, sport or area, and as soon as they held a majority anywhere they promptly excluded the Whites with or without force as necessary. They absolutely never asked for more Whites to make their areas more diverse, and repaid 'cultural understanding' and 'sensitivity' with hate.

Every single diverse society, everywhere, was declining, as every one had throughout history. Nature's lesson is that Incompatible human groups can't live in the same territory, we'd ignored that fundamental rule once more, to our great loss. America was bowing down before the Barbarians who were freely crossing her frontiers. And as Rome went, so would we before much longer, he thought.

As a final few thoughts for the kids to consider on the way home, he said to them that Scientists and wildlife preservation people alike were always trying to preserve diversity among wildlife for future generations to enjoy. Similarly, the reason we had diversity among mankind today was because their ancestors had practiced segregation yesterday. It was the politicians and media who were going against nature and promoting the opposite. They should be asking themselves why the most natural instincts of all, wanting to live among your own kind and wanting to preserve their own ethnic group, led to people being accused of things.

And despite what they were taught at school, it didn't lead to violence. On the contrary, abusing or hurting someone just because of the color of their skin had always and quite correctly been considered a barbaric and low thing to do and strongly punished accordingly. Whites didn't criticize people just for having a different skin color, what they'd always criticized was Blacks' overall thuggish behavior and attitudes. It was the Blacks and others who had no such hang-ups about purely racial violence even against, or in some cases, especially against, women and children.

What he really resented was Whites being weakened, demoralized and forced to try to get along with Blacks, who in turn were allowed to be as segregationist and violent as they wanted, and were told that it was entirely the White man's fault that they didn't succeed in life. History showed that problems always occurred when incompatible races and cultures weren't given any choice about living together. When natural segregation and non-interference were obeyed there were never any problems.

The rest of the violence today came from the anti-racists, who didn't seem to realize they weren't being taught to protest against actions, rather they were helping sweep away the very things in which they believed uppermost, namely freedom of speech and thought. History showed that moral terror always preceded physical terror, and the anti-racists who wanted to take away peoples right to so much as choose their neighbors were unknowingly spreading both.

Aaron recited a famous quote which was never heard today:

"I may disagree with your opinion, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it"

Another job he'd wanted to do for awhile got bumped to the top of the list as things got worse. He took Barbara and both of the kids out into the country to a gun range and spent hours teaching them gun and hunting safety and proper use, how to aim at both stationary and moving targets.

He brought 4 firearms out to the range, but only brought the .22 rifle from the Car till he was sure of who was around them. If a nosy person spotted him with more than one firearm in his possession... Even buying ammunition required a bar-coded firearms license now, and shops were required to report anyone trying to purchase more than one packet or type of ammunition at a time. That hadn't stopped him, Stevie and all their other friends from amassing a good sized stockpile by purchasing a packet a week, every week, for years. They'd simply swapped different caliber ammunition between them as needed.

He relaxed when he saw the other people at the range were just as nervous as he was, a few were quietly swapping between pistols and rifles from their Cars while trying to hide the excess. After watching the body language around them for a few minutes he realized nobody was going to report him and threw caution to the wind. He brought out his .38 and 9mm pistols and the 9mm rifle and openly handed them to the family to use. That broke the ice around them, and the others at the range relaxed and slowly began doing the same. Even 10 year old Cassandra fired the .22 rifle until she had a pile of spent shells next to her. As he'd expected, the kids quickly proved adept at shooting moving targets. Children's reflexes and timing are better than adults, he mused. All 3 of them took turns with the pistols and larger caliber rifle. The Children's ages didn't bother him or the other people at the range, as long as people completely followed safety rules, age didn't matter. Aaron was a firm believer that if you treated Children like grownups and trusted them with responsibility, they repaid the favor many fold

He also strongly believed that Government control was no substitute for personal responsibility, and for that matter it shouldn't even need to be their concern. Responsibility was a term never heard these days. All there was were finger pointing, blaming the rest of society and 'gun culture' after crimes, never the maniac who'd misused them. The current auspices for removing them from law abiding citizens were "National Security" and "Prevention of Terror". They should have told that to the Gangs, he thought. He regarded Firearms like any other tool; they could be used or misused. It was hard to believe that until the 1950's you could even purchase Rocket Launchers by mail order, the sense of responsibility back then was strong enough that such things were never abused, you could have all the fun you wanted out in the country and nobody ever got hurt. It was the criminals who misused firearms, a fact which Governments worldwide never seemed to grasp when controlling their use by normal law abiding citizens. No wonder why in one country after another where firearms had been seized, gun crime instantly skyrocketed against a now defenseless population.

At home afterward, he further lectured the Children on the circumstances where they were allowed to use firearms to defend themselves, and not to hesitate when necessary. The usual iron-clad safety rule was to absolutely never, ever, ever aim a Firearm at a person, never. He made a one-time-only exception for them and double checked to make sure the .38 caliber pistol was empty before going through the circumstances when they could use it on an

intruder, and encouraged them to pull the trigger as he donned a balaclava, imitated a burglar and taunted them with "You don't have the Guts to use that" then tried snatching it from their hands or attacking them regardless of demands to stop. He then loaded both pistols with the safety catches on and hid them under the tables next to their beds so only they would know they were there and were instantly reachable in the event of an emergency. They already knew never to open the door unless they knew who was behind it, he further suggested it was a good idea that even if they did, one of them could stand by at the hallway entrance with a pistol held around the corner in case it wasn't who they expected or other people were there and forced their way in; if there wasn't any problem the holder could quietly disappear for a few seconds and put it away again without anyone seeing it or raising the slightest suspicion. He also told them never to say they had a gun, not even if someone was threatening them from outside the door, and how a Gang trick was to distract someone at the door while they tried to break in at the back. Lastly, he explicitly warned them not to phone the Police in the event they did shoot someone inside the house, he or their Mother would take care of it.

The programming work went on. Most of the old time Viruses had been created by Teens using down loadable programs built for the purpose, few were entirely home-built, many had flaws and coding errors which stymied their progress, and fewer still used more than one single method to disseminate. He knew the coding; it'd been part of his job years before to block viruses. And now he was building one. If things hadn't been so desperate he'd have laughed at the turnaround. He had the philosophy that every persons duty was to do even one small meaningful thing for their country during their lifetime, and God willing, this was it.

It would spread through email addresses gathered from address books and auto complete entries, through port scans and buffer overruns. It spread through Java Script, ActiveX Applets, in fact every tried and true route. Simultaneously. Openings made for NetSafe were open to other things too. And that was just the start of it.

The really fun part was what he called the "attack director" add-on. Each affected computer would remain in contact with the one which had infected it and so on down the line. 1 in 100 randomly selected itself to direct IP and port scans by signaling other infected computers to scan for vulnerable networks and computers. 1 in 10,000 would assign parts of each computers inbuilt dictionary and combinations thereof as possible name/password combinations during password cracking attempts, and 1 in a million would direct simultaneous attacks by all affected computers on resistant targets. On typical networks there were always weak links; the larger the Network, the greater the chance one solitary machine hadn't been updated or fire walled correctly. Through sheer brute force this virus should find them. Once the door was open the rest was easy.

And in a large and ever increasing segment of the population he knew, there would be almost completely unprotected computers. The medical profession was concerned about outbreaks if less than 50% of the population were vaccinated. And thanks to NetSafe, the percentage of safeguarded computers was now close to zero. With the ongoing efforts to modernize and computerize and put as much as humanly possible on line on the Net for easy monitoring as well as convenience, right down to household appliances, it presented more targets than ever before and more so by the day.

The virus cargo itself was a monster. It's first and foremost target was the NetSafe software, deleting a vital file it needed to operate. Thank goodness he'd stored the long removed discussions of how the software worked. The next

target was the Operating system itself; on any computer above a certain clock speed it would delete files at random until the computer died.

He wouldn't have been surprised if there was a store of similar viruses sitting quietly in Government computers, ready to attack non-compliant countries at a moments notice, and also in forgotten vaults in assimilated countries. Every country has its special police and army forces, and that was just what they admitted to. The contingency plans and preparations for extreme circumstances were guaranteed to be both hair raising and never spoken of.

Aaron just wished he could test it first or run it past a true security expert for advice or corrections. There was one possibility he knew, his old school friend Matthew, but whether he'd support this kind of an enterprise was entirely another matter. Matthew was one of the rare combinations of Brains and Brawn; at school he could bench press 140 kilos, afterward closer to 180, and he had the rare and fortunate gift of a near photographic memory. He was also deeply suspicious of Government and politicians and made no secret of it. He'd got where he was by being unconventional in his ideas and techniques, and Aaron hoped he was still that way inclined. Hard work and liberal attitudes just didn't seem to co-exist, he noted. Aaron knew he'd lost family lately, but then who hadn't?

He phoned his friend on a pay phone to arrange a social call; he could only see how the conversation went. Matthew answered the phone on the 10th ring, and promptly agreed to a visit. The time didn't matter he said, and he sounded desperate for someone to talk to.

Matthew looked awful when he saw him, and his formerly immaculate house was a half-tidied mess. His family wasn't to be seen. Upon asking after them, Matthew reluctantly replied that one of his Children was dead after a point-blank drive-by shooting, the other was in and out of psychiatric care after witnessing the whole thing, and his wife had left to be with her family, he said while sipping beer and Whiskey.

The last time they'd spoken he'd been the IT security chief and head technician at a Military Installation. When a really tough programming job or fix or a possible security breach had come to light, he'd been the first considered for the job. He saw to it that it was dealt with, and promptly. It wasn't uncommon for him to work 22 hours a day for a week if necessary to get a job done. His pay was proportional to his dedication, and his bonuses equally so. He'd been proud of the fact a large part of his job he couldn't describe openly. He'd finished almost top of the State in school exams, and now he was living day to day.

"My god, what in the hell happened to you, Matthew?"

"Everything did, Aaron. Everything", he muttered.

"Your job?"

"Reviewed out from under me."

"Superseded?"

"Pushed, more like"

"How?"

"After Beatrice died and Rhonda left, I asked at a meeting why we were supporting a Government which didn't support the taxpayer. That did it, out the door, security clearance revoked, the lot", he spat.

"My god."

"It gets better, look over there", he said, pointing to a Microphone and Internet camera casually tossed into the corner.

"You used to be a huge Internet Chat fan, why not any more?"

"Go see for yourself. Turn on my computer, then click onto the CNN news page."

He did; it came up in a flash. He always had the highest speed line going. Then he noticed, Matthew still used an old fashioned modem with incoming and outgoing data indicators. The moment the page stopped coming in, the data stopped. Nothing special.

"Now click on the Science and Technology section"

He did, it came up in a split second.

"Now watch the data."

Nothing happened for a few seconds, and then suddenly there was a big burst of data. All Outgoing.

"Don't tell me!"

"Yep... That's our 'friend' NetSafe at work for you. Anytime I go anywhere near anything remotely technically inclined, an alert goes off somewhere. It turned my whole damned computer into a Trojan, and that included the bloody Mike and Camera."

No wonder they ended up tossed in the corner. Suddenly enraged, he threw the half empty can of Beer into the wall next to the discarded hardware.

"That doesn't help, you know."

"I've looked down a Gun barrel heaps of times lately, would it be preferable if I pulled the trigger, dammit?"

"No, I meant the beer, you've got good taste, it seems a waste to throw it away."

Matthew looked stunned, then burst out laughing, a welcome sight in the circumstances.

"You always knew how to make someone laugh at the worst times", he commented.

"Let's go for a drive, there's something I want to show you."

"Like what?", he asked, looking curious.

"Not here", Aaron replied. He wasn't taking the chance Matt's house was monitored more than he was aware of.

"Oh, okay...", he shrugged.

They got into his Car and drove up to a scenic outlook.

"Now, what's this all about?" Matt asked when they'd stopped.

"Would you like some revenge for what's happened?", he asked outright.

"If I ever got my hands on the bastards who shot Beatrice, I wouldn't shoot them...", he replied darkly.

"I mean the bigger picture, the Government."

"Oh?", he said, looking interested.

"I've got something better you might be able to help me with."

Aaron pulled the laptop computer out of his bag, set it down in front of him. When the old computer had booted, Aaron brought up the code and let Matthew look at it.

He studied it for a long time, scrolled up and down a few times and studied it closely. His eyes went wide.

"You've been a busy boy, Aaron. And very, very, VERY naughty...", he said, and leaned back to think as he always did.

"Yeah."

"If you got caught with this..."

"It's not hard to guess."

"Well, you're on the right track, but some of it just plain won't work. This part...", he tapped a section of text on screen, "uses an old Windows flaw that was fixed years ago. You'd be hammering at a steel wall. You've been reading through the old Hacker texts haven't you? I used to have them as well till my clearance got yanked"

Aaron briefly took over, clicked up to a separate directory full of old text files, Net articles and saved-off Web Pages

"Oooh... Nice", he said, then went back to perusing the code.

"That will work, but this won't", he said, tapping the screen. "This file you're trying to delete is now a protected system file, it won't just let you do that", he pondered. "Trash this file instead", he added, changing the reference to another file and folder. "That'll stop NetSafe acting on commands or reporting, but it'll also kill the system when it's rebooted."

"Who cares?", he said.

"And you'll need a lot higher than superuser access to trash a high-tech operating system."

"I was relying on people being sloppy enough to allow it to work since NetSafe has stopped Hackers and Viruses"

"A few are, most aren't. Not that it makes much difference these days."

Companies still have security departments of course, but about the only thing they're allowed to protect against now are threats from their own employees."

"You don't think much of Internet security don't you?"

Matt sighed in frustration.

"Aaron, you really have no idea don't you? When the rot starts right at the very top, nothing below it should surprise you. Spyware and Backdoors were built into operating systems by everyone involved in its production and some who weren't. Windows is the most appropriately named damned system ever produced, the further you look into it the worse it gets. Internet security has been nothing but an inside joke since long before Netsafe came into being. Why do you think nothing vital is ever connected to outside networks? They won't even allow a phone line in the same room as classified computers."

Matt turned his attention back to the laptop.

"There's admin commands that require superuser access, modify one of their support files to run it and you're in business, that's one of the ways the Military and Law Enforcement used to hack into computers. And that's why the Government got so hard on Hacking, not because they were a threat to people, but because they kept finding the built in system loopholes and flaws they exploited."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?"

Aaron recalled a brief news item years before about a programmer who stumbled upon a horrendous system flaw which enabled total control over a system via emailed code. You didn't even need to click on the message to instantly lose control over your computer. He'd reported the flaw, and was told by the Operating System manufacturer that it didn't work, even after senior Law Enforcement confirmed it did. They continued to deny it even after he sent them a sample program demonstrating it in action. At the same time he noticed unusual activity on his computer when he was on line, and the messages and files concerning the flaw were deleted from his computer. The reader could only gain the impression that programmer had stumbled upon something he wasn't meant to find.

Matthews mood turned serious.

"Have you ever connected this computer directly to the mains?"

"Only to recharge, it mainly gets used in the evening out of the way"

"You're lucky. Computers have a unique startup power spike the power companies detect. They look for computers that don't connect to the Net on startup and tell NetSafe to watch those houses more closely."

"I didn't know that!"

"It's not something the media like to brag about. It also sets you to a higher alert status if it catches you saying anything against the government in email or wherever, if you belong to certain religions, if you email to anyone in a Country that's been assimilated recently, if you're an active programmer, or if you repeatedly pay attention to certain news articles. Namely, regarding hacking, security faults, and anything remotely related to anti-government resistance."

"Which puts you at the top of just about every list?"

He nodded.

"Anyone who gets alerted gets the full treatment at State lines, Airports, that sort of thing. That's why I don't bother traveling any more."

His mood turned thoughtful once more.

"Have you been using the Net to search for anything...?", he asked.

"Only from Net Cafes and Library computers"

"Paranoid Git!" he snapped, and then laughed. "You should be right below their Radar then... But you know, no matter what you do, there'll be digital fingerprints and log files leading straight back to you if you release this?"

"It's 'when', not 'if' I let it loose, and as for tracking me down, that's been taken care of. And I called you on a Pay phone, not my landline in case you're wondering."

Matthew looked startled, and then agreed. "First thing they'll do is seize your phone records for the last few years."

"Whereabouts are you planning on going?"

Aaron told him the plan and the location he'd chosen. Matthew never talked to anyone, ever, he was one person you could absolutely trust, he was literally an information Black hole. He could also appear to vehemently hold any viewpoint to anyone then revert to normal the moment they were out of earshot, which was no doubt the reason why he'd gotten as far as he had. Like Aaron, he had nothing but contempt for attitudes based on education instead of real-life experience.

"Well, if you're going to put Mankind back 200 years in a couple of minutes, we might as well get used to that", he laughed, "That's as good an idea as I've heard lately. I wanted to join the uprising in Los Angeles but the Army beat me to it."

"So did I, I think everyone did. It'll happen again, someone else will start shooting and it'll all be on once more. But the first thing we've got to do is bring down the power structure then things will be more even."

"Can I borrow that laptop? I'd like to do some work on that little beastie of yours, I want to load some good programming software onto that machine, tighten the coding and add some more tricks and personal touches to it"

"You're welcome. What're your plans for when the proverbial hits the fan?"

"Well, I'm not staying here, that's for damned sure. I'd better start preparing, one way or another. Fight or flight, that's the choice... In your case I'd definitely choose flight, you'll be worth more than Osama Bin Laden after this."

"I want to fight, but my family has to come first. Once they're safe then we'll see. There's trouble coming, whether we like it or not."

Matthew paused to think, looked as though he wanted to say something important, and then changed his mind.

There was a time and place for everything, but if an uprising began anywhere within driving distance, Aaron had made up his mind to join in without any hesitation.

The next day he was headed into the wilderness again. Finally satisfied with the house, he'd turned his full attention to the gardens and finer details. The gardens were progressing well, the soil was good and supported the full range of plants without any problems, for which he was extremely grateful. Digging out the tree stumps as the gardens expanded was a huge job, if he managed two in a day he was happy, he had to cut numerous thick roots as he dug right around each stump in turn then sawed the tree off well below ground level. As the gardens progressed he finished building stout fencing and was considering bolstering them with solar powered electric fencing as well. One of their neighbors had already had a mild setback when wild Goats smelling the food within pressed on-mass against his flimsy fencing until it'd collapsed. A painful lesson everyone learned from. It could've been much worse, it could have happened just before the plants reached maturity instead of just after planting.

There were other considerations too. He'd made sure early on to plant a fair sized area of Garlic; as well as liking it personally, Garlic solution made an excellent natural insecticide, it could even cure external infections in people. If it worked for their ancestors, it would work for him. He hadn't spotted any porcupines so far in the area, if need be he intended to bring a few along. They ate the snails and slugs that loved vegetables, and for that reason he'd actively promoted them in his gardens. He'd learned all sorts of little things over the years from talking to older gardeners, among them was to always look after your porcupines, to feed them Cat food or meat if need be, which they loved, and never milk as some people mistakenly did. They were lactose intolerant. "Companion planting" was another trick. Planting Marigolds next to Tomatoes and other veggies kept Aphids away from them. A little trick the biology teacher at school recommended was to urinate into the soil, it made good nitrogen-based fertilizer. Another lesser but still important thing he did was to plant mint under the windows of the house since flies hated it, it was a natural repellent. He also brought out a number of white plastic bags for future use to shred and attach to branches to deter birds away from Fruits and Berries. Some gardeners swore by that instead of scarecrows which had limited effectiveness.

Aaron saved building the beds and furniture for last, they were his favorite job and he was looking forward to taking his time on those. First and foremost came the beds, he quartered segments of Logs with the chainsaw to make the stands and sides, stripped the bark, planed, sanded then varnished them. He'd always loved unpainted natural timber for furniture, the grain really added to the feel of a house. Smaller segments sawn lengthwise made the bed boards. He made his and Barbara's double bed with especially high quartered log segments, cut notches into them at normal bed height and rounded the holes before slotting and nailing the sides into place. She'd always wanted a four poster bed; this would give her a pleasant surprise. Next, he built a large deckchair under the overhanging roof as a reminder of happy times at their former home watching sunrises and sunsets. When time allowed he also built some shelving. The rest could be worked on at leisure. He'd already brought out dismantled aluminum chairs, and a folding dining and reading table would soon follow. Constructing a proper wooden table and more shelving could wait.

With the short term necessities mostly taken care of it was time to start

dealing with long term needs. In a number of short stay trips he brought out more gardening tools and agricultural supplies, all except a few hundred rounds of ammunition, and containers of modern hide tanning chemicals as well as a large quantity of Oak bark which he'd obtained with difficulty for natural tanning. He'd collected the skin scrapers, hunting knives, sharpeners and steel mesh protective Butchers gloves he'd need for skinning, gutting and cleaning of hides.

Cassy wanted some heavy duty plastic sheeting taken out so she could build a miniature glasshouse, and he happily obliged. Among the list of priority items was bringing out or building a meat smoker to help with preservation. Salting and pickling were the best methods to keep raw meat but both used a lot of irreplaceable resources; better to use readily available materials even if the final result didn't last anywhere near as long. Then there were of course the bedding and clothing, cooking utensils, candles and a collection of books to read, games to play and music to listen to. Among the smaller but still important items that collected out there were Insect spray, Citronella candles, mosquito netting and to a lesser extent Sun screen. He also brought out several pairs of binoculars and an extremely expensive set of upgraded 3rd generation night vision gear. The most annoying items were empty 40L water tanks and the watering cans which went out one at a time strapped to his pack. They only weighed a few kilos, but seemed to deliberately go out of their way to catch on every branch and bit of undergrowth on the way there. Other possibilities he was contemplating included solar powered lights which charged during the day and glowed brightly all night long, and maybe even solar water heating panels either mounted on the roof or by the river if there were too many trees around the house for them to be effective. He was damned if he was going to miss out on hot showers, however brief.

The remainder of that time could be spent moving additional supplies and smaller household and personal items out there and doing other necessary jobs and building. Barbara did her part by organizing the rest of the family to sort out what they wanted taken into the Forest from among their personal possessions. Personal needs and anything practical was at the top of the list, and then Aaron would take out a maximum of 20 kilos of items from each family member over the next few months, the rest of what they wanted they'd carry out themselves when they left. It meant making some hard choices over what they truly valued, so they sorted out reminders of happy times, small posters, pictures, books and writing materials and their interests. Not surprisingly the kids chose to keep few reminders from school.

With the worsening situation and the completion of the House they'd quickened the pace of preparations, they'd been happy to make the trip once a month, then it became every 2 weeks, and finally weekly. They couldn't believe how bad things had gotten in less than a year, both he and Barbara began to worry they'd literally left it to the last minute, and they'd finally settled on a date when they'd leave. He'd had to drop a few of the plans and had commenced gardening in earnest for the family now and not just for himself, timing each separate vegetable planting so they'd be coming into their prime around the time they arrived. They'd also prepared an evacuation plan in case their neighborhood was invaded. It had happened before.

During this final phase he'd had to miss out on celebrating Cassy's 11th birthday, something he'd never have dreamed of doing otherwise. He'd offered to stay but Cassy shook her head.

"Dad, you're building a safe place for us to stay, that's more important than my Birthday" she said, and hugged her Father. He promised to make it up to her later.

He'd also gone to the expense of prefabricating some airtight stainless steel containers for storage. Before starting walking to the Log cabin on one trip, he dragged the first out and three quarter buried it several hundred meters from the road and covered the remainder with the spoil. He'd fill it over time with Food that wasn't preparable out there. Flour, Sugar, Rice, Salt, Pepper, powdered milk, Vinegar, Cooking oil and the like as well as a few luxuries like Chocolate and Wine for special occasions. Others he intended filling with fuel canisters, necessary fungicides and pesticides, propagation supplies, biodegradable washing powder and other household chemicals. It would be a long, long walk to pick up needed things, but he hoped they'd be independent enough not to have to make that trip too often.

They were working their way through the purchase list they'd prepared and piling food and items into the spare room ready to be shifted out. On some trips they only carried out and filled a container, and on those occasions he was happy for the rest of the family to assist carrying loads from the trailer. He wanted several months of food stored at the house and 6 months in the forest containers before they left, and jokingly commented to Barbara that he was wondering which would wear out first; him or the Car. He'd several times walked the 20 miles from the road to the house in one go, starting at the first light of dawn and arriving at sunset, but had suffered for days afterward each time. He wasn't getting any younger, he thought. She encouraged him constantly, massaging his sore back and limbs in the bath with him on his return, and setting aside the next load to fit into the backpack.

Among other things he carried out his fathers' old but well maintained .30-06 hunting rifle and several hundred rounds of ammunition for it which he'd purchased before the law really toughened up on gun ownership by law abiding citizens. There was also fencing wire, more fuel for the Chainsaw and several sets of solar panels and recharger's The new folding plastic solar cells were a huge bonus, they cost only 20 cents per watt now instead of the several dollars they used to be, and everyone was installing them on roofs to cut expenditure. He took enough that even on a cloudy day they'd have enough power. The question then was whether to permanently install them on the roof and risk damage from flying forest debris during storms; that and his concern about possible electrical fire when he was absent convinced him to leave them folded up at ground level for when they were needed.

At school he'd learned that what were nowadays simple chores were what'd really gotten to the early Pioneers, washing clothes used to be an all-day job. Camping stores carried miniature machines which could handle a couple of kilos of items at a time. That would suffice. A small electric cooker would also be a big bonus; he'd decided right from the outset never to have a fire in good weather, any smoke would be visible for miles.

Barbara would also go nuts without her Concert radio to listen to, and he wanted to keep up with the news out there, for what it was worth. You learned more between the lines these days, little of importance ever reached the media, what did somehow reach the mainstream was quickly censored or removed. The populations were being kept inert with half truths and subtle deceit, mindless comedies and distractions of every kind. They usually didn't have to resort to outright lies when they could subtly distort the news through careful selection and omission, sensationalizing otherwise minor stories to distract peoples attention from important issues like US foreign policy changes, or when they had to report them, immediately afterward changing the subject to other trivia so the short memoried public would soon forget about them. Even now, you still occasionally found details from reading multiple unrelated sources which the mainstream media chose not to report. The citizens

of the former USSR knew they were being totally lied to, the controlled Western press only reported what was convenient to the Government, they only ever interviewed people who agreed with the chosen viewpoint and never allowed any free discussion of important issues, no matter how destructive they were to the population as a whole.

Things just kept getting worse in their area. Stevie's family were among the last of their group still living in the declining neighborhood they used to call home, it was typical of them that they'd volunteered to remain behind to ferry supplies purchased using the others Bank accounts and credit cards into the Forest until their little group was independent. Barbara related on his return from yet another trip into the Forest how she'd been making dinner for herself and the kids one evening when an unfamiliar Car parked in Stevie's driveway across the road. Suddenly there came shouts and screams followed by a long series of popping sounds from inside the house, then silence, as Barbara and the other neighbors loaded their guns and ran to help. After the events of the last few years this was not a complacent neighborhood any more, all thoughts of peacefully getting on with certain peoples were dispelled with repeated bitter experience and often violence. Hillary staggered out the side door of the house splattered with blood, followed a few seconds later by Stevie, who waved the neighbors back. A few minutes later he came out with the keys and drove the strangers Car around the back of the house. After it was dark, Barbara spotted him driving the Car away while Hillary followed in their Car. The next day a news report had come through of 4 Gang members found shot to death in their burning Car, and the Police assumed it was a drug deal gone wrong.

Nothing needed to be said and nobody was going to talk, but they obviously couldn't take the chance either. Stevie made several rushed trips ferrying things out of the area and making last purchases in the next 24 hours, then he drove away after handing the house keys to acquaintances of his family who'd been living in their garage for months. Neither he nor any of his family was ever seen there again.

Everyone knew Stevie had done the right thing. When these people invaded occupied houses, often it wasn't just burglary and gang rape that ensued; it was hours of torture and mutilation then murder. That instant response also encouraged Aaron; all the efforts to teach people about "Tolerance" and to "Give people a chance" were fast going out the door after a brutal dose of reality. That storm system was brewing fast, if it hadn't already boiled over in places but been silenced by the media.

He liked the people now living in his friends former home, they were yet more refugees from newly Black occupied areas. He was also a programmer so they had lots in common there, she was a former Bank manager who'd happily given up a career to dedicate time to their 2 boys to bring up happy well adjusted kids, they remembered the good times of their youth and wanted to pass on the same. They'd carefully planned her pregnancies starting with health and genetic checks, getting her weight and fitness right, taking supplements like folic acid before conception and finally stopping drinking alcohol to give her every chance for a largely unassisted delivery and their newborns every chance for a healthy life. They were poor like many of their neighbors had become of late, but wealthy in life skills and friendliness. Considering how pleasant and attractive they both were, they would've been fighting off the competition for each other, Aaron mused. No matter how bad things were, they were always positive for their kids' sakes. Everyone liked them, they were always helping others, and he'd been building with Stevie's little group out there in the National Park. They were the spontaneously friendly type who immediately made friends of almost everyone they met. That didn't make any difference to the

Black teens and adults alike who'd smashed the windows of their house and car, abused and assaulted them, intentionally dumped trash into their property and repeatedly burgled their rented house. She'd just become pregnant with their third child before they'd fled with little more than the clothes on their backs after enduring an entire night of having bottles, bricks and stones thrown through their windows by Blacks shouting at them to get out of 'their turf'.

A few days later Matthew arranged a meeting from a pay phone then returned the laptop discreetly. He'd been preparing too, his Car was filled with Tools and equipment, he was making his moves as well. He looked a lot healthier and more alive than when he'd seen him at his house, as he always did when he was busy.

"It gives me less time to think", was his comment to Aaron when he remarked on the improvement.

"I had to get it out of my house, it couldn't stay there, it's just so damned dangerous now for someone in my position", he started.

"What happened?"

"I think someone tipped off the Police that I wanted to join the uprising in LA. For a few weeks I spotted Cars following me, the works."

"Did you get the chance to do much on the Virus?"

"You bet. I added a whole lot of stuff I used to help the Military with."

"Um, that may lead them straight back to you."

"Maybe, maybe not. There's lots of others who know what I do so they'll have a list of people to work through. Besides, half the programmers I know aren't half as puritanical as they make out they are."

Aaron had to chuckle at that. He knew Matt was telling the truth there, for a short time Aaron been a technician at an Internet Service Provider and had seen firsthand the Administrators poring over emails and laughing at the contents. Many of them had the morals of Hyenas. It was amazing how open many people were about things like who'd had sex with whom and what they'd done in bed together, all via the supposed anonymity of email.

"There's also a message hidden in there, it's in a code that's meant to be broken, and boy are they going to be pissed when they do."

"The more the better."

"I didn't have time to finish tidying it up and getting it ready, but you know how to do that."

Aaron nodded.

"Yes. The outline is done; it just has to be filled in... We don't know how much longer we'll be staying here, things are getting rough, I'm making trips into the Forest every week now to get stuff out of here, when there's nothing left to do I'm letting that thing go."

"Try to hold on, get that Virus ready as fast as you can, if it gets too much

then contact me before you let it loose, I'm trying to find an opportune time when it'll do the absolute most damage. Remember, I used to do backups and things, I know when systems are at their most vulnerable."

"Could it be blocked before it really gets down to business?"

"That would depend on how much attention it gets before it's too late. Internet security will detect it before companies do, and it's bypassing a lot of security systems, it should just look like data until the traffic builds. Blocking it is another matter, but the quicker it works, the better in that regard. And as for the military and banking systems... well, we knew we never had a chance of touching those, didn't we?"

Aaron wasn't surprised. Everyone knew, even if never confirmed, that military budgets were ten or twenty times the civilian budgets.

Matthew reached into the glove compartment of the Car, brought out a Hard Drive and handed it to Aaron.

"After you've let that Virus go, rip the hard drive out from your lounge computer and plug this in. Get rid of yours; chuck it into the Rubbish miles away, whatever. And get out immediately. NetSafe cleared the way for specialized software which searches for originating IP addresses through ISP log files, they'll have you in their sights in minutes or less if their systems hold out that long after the Virus gets to work."

"What's on this drive?"

"It's just an old commercial data backup unit from a plastics recycling company, something for the Feds to waste their time on. You absolutely can't let your lounge computers hard drive or this laptop fall into Government hands, you wouldn't believe the data recovery techniques the Military has, I know about them, they're way above anything the Police and Civilian sector have, their budgets are magnitudes higher. They can read the magnetic fields directly to recover data after it has been written over a dozen times. They will go through your hard drive layer by layer, as long as it takes, to get all the contact details on your machine, anyone you've ever written to, to know who to watch to try and find you, and they'll go right down that list doing the same to their computers."

"Including you", Aaron caught on.

"Including me", he affirmed.

The laptop might never have been connected to the Net, but it'd have unique software product IDs instantly traceable to Matt.

"What about the email log files on ISPs?", Aaron asked, "Those go back for years"

Matthew just smiled and patted the old laptop. He'd seen that one a long time before Aaron did and included coding specifically attacking those files.

"How are your plans going for what you're doing after..."

"Slowly, it's a whole different lifestyle like you've said. But whatever happens, I won't support the Government any longer. I could get a high-tech computing job just like THIS", he said, snapping his fingers to illustrate the point, "But I won't even so much as contribute a cent of taxes to them. They

can go to HELL!" he shouted.

"Oh, and don't be surprised if you get a message from someone else, that's all I'll say. Just be ready when the time comes."

"Have you told anyone about this?", Aaron asked, alarmed.

"A couple of people I absolutely, utterly trust, don't worry, they know how to keep their mouths shut, and they're no lovers of the Government I'll tell you that."

"I know you, but I don't know them, that's all."

"You should know my judgment better than that by now, don't worry about it." In passing he said one last thing to Aaron.

"Don't call or visit me again, not even on a pay phone, you can't take any chance of being put under surveillance too, not with that thing in your hands."

He pulled out a photo and handed it to him.

"A kilometer down the road from my place is a small Forest reserve, a hundred meters inside it along the walking track is the tree in the photo. If you've got a message or anything, bury it a few centimeters down at the base on the opposite side to the track, I drop by there every day while taking the Dog for a walk. And if you don't have a message, feel free to leave a few Beers if you're in the area."

Aaron smiled at that, and the two of them parted company.

That evening after the days jobs were done he perused the coding of the Virus.

It had more than tripled its size, only a small part of which was due to the encoded text embedded in it, and it had some weird coding the likes of which he'd never seen before. He knew Matthews style after working with him briefly, much of it was different. Some of the new code was sloppy for instance, whereas Matthew was a perfectionist through and through, he'd been known to spend hours experimenting to tighten loops to save microseconds of processor time. It had the look of something that'd been put together in a hurry, and by at least a couple of people. Multiple platforms were targeted using a long list of vulnerabilities in networks, programs and file sharing, absolutely none of which he'd known about. Aaron had programmed six separate distribution methods into it for Windows; he stopped counting now when it topped a hundred, with dozens of pages of code yet to go. It stepped through one vulnerability after another as it went down the list looking for a way in. The few Super viruses in the old days used program and OS flaws to enter a system without any action required on the part of the owner; this went way, way beyond that, it employed cracks in everything from the OS to pre-installed software to gain access. He spotted several subsections of UNIX coding in it as well to be similarly slipped into mainframes. There were some smaller changes too, two of which struck him as particularly evil. The delete files part had been reworked into a delete with overwrite for absolute maximum damage. And one randomly chosen infected computer in a thousand didn't have its NetSafe software disabled, leaving it stable but quietly infected for when the networks came back on line. If they came back, he corrected himself. My God... this was a Global Killer, he thought. This wasn't made just to temporarily disrupt systems, it would bring them down and keep them down for as long as it took to

fix all the operating system flaws.

Apart from the methods used by Law Enforcement and Military, Aaron immediately thought of one possible way this kind of information could have been obtained. Tools were being developed to search enormous volumes of code for rarely used subsections and combinations of variables and circumstances which caused problems, all the better to produce crash and hacker-proof software and find back doors and traps left by previous programmers. Which was, of course, the reason why the Operating System computer giants weren't interested in using them. And he knew Matthew had had a hand in writing those programs. He had the strong feeling there was a lot Matthew hadn't said, but he wasn't about to ask either. There were big chunks of Matt's life he never spoke of. Every Governments absolute worst fear was its top people turning against them, and in this case it'd been more than realized.

He couldn't hold back from grinning when he left the back room.

The next few trips out were routine, carrying out items in short stay trips. At the same time he also began taking the Laptop out there to code the Virus in peace and quiet for a day or two at a time. It was a shame to work on an agent of destruction in such a peaceful place, but it was far more sociable than pattering away on the keyboard for hours while the family was in the lounge. The subsections of coding came slowly, it was just a matter of filling in the gaps as Matt had said, but there couldn't be any mistakes at all.

Then suddenly one evening Barbara put several large and well-wrapped packages aside to be taken out to the cabin, and got his full attention by insisting he wasn't to open them. He had no problem with that, except that her body language didn't square with her explanation that they were just more foodstuffs for out there, so he assumed they were some surprises and presents for the family. After 18 years together he knew her nuances, mostly. He knew when she had an ulterior motive, and she similarly knew his, when he wanted to work alone. He'd learned and kept on learning never to underestimate her, and had developed the theory that she was sometimes deliberately unpredictable just to keep him on his toes. Of course, he never admitted knowing as such. One of the packages was hard edged and very heavy, the other was light, but regardless he wouldn't open them. Relationships were built on trust, patience and constant little surprises. Sometimes she scared him when she seemed to know what he needed before he did, the hardest thing was trying to do the same for her.

Several weeks and more trips into the Forest later taking full backpack loads of personal items and prepping the gardens, they too reached their absolute limit of endurance.

Cassy and Barbara were shopping early in the morning when it was relatively safe, when they spotted a group of people seemingly following them from shop to shop. They didn't take much notice until they briefly split up to visit separate shops. Suddenly Cassy wasn't there any more. Barbara thought she heard her crying out, and on looking down the road spotted her struggling to stop from being stuffed into a car by 4 gang members. She screamed and ran over and began hitting them, turning into a snarling, biting, kicking, clawing creature as she pulled her daughter away. Briefly distracted from their prey, Cassy broke free and the two of them ran off.

With the lack of Law Enforcement these days the criminals had little to fear. Instead of running as they would have in the old days, they jumped from their Car and chased the two women up the road and into a shop instead, where they remained in a security camera covered area.

"What, are you scared or something", one yelled as the whole group waited and stared at them, just outside the view of the Cameras.

"What're you looking at?" one shouted when Barbara glanced in their direction.

Half an hour passed, punctured by lewd remarks and comments to the two women, until the group finally left. Or so they thought. The moment they left the store, the group reappeared and continued following them. They managed to make a break to the Car and make a screeching exit as fists and feet hit the sides and rocks shattered windows.

Aarons natural instant reaction on hearing this was pure rage. He didn't say a word, he loaded both Pistols, pocketed them and all the ammunition he could carry. He knew exactly where the predators would be - at or near the car park where they were last seen. Why should they leave? They controlled the area, not Law Enforcement. The Police usually barely investigated actual crime as it was, attempted crime didn't even get looked at.

"Tell the neighbors to get ready, I'm going to start the next LA", he said and headed for the doorway to deal natural justice. Barbara jumped onto his back and tried to drag him back.

"No, don't Aaron! We need you!"

"They're dead, they're all dead!" he shouted and kicked to try and get her arms off from around him.

Cassy wailed as they fought, he trying to leave the house to exact vengeance and Barbara clawing him back.

"Don't! For Gods sakes Aaron don't do it! Think of the Kids!"

That did it. Instantly he was coherent again. He slumped and allowed myself to be pulled back from the Doorway.

"We don't want to live here any more!", Cassy cried.

"And we won't", he snarled, "You're out of here tomorrow morning. I'll get the backpacks out. Pack your most precious things, leave the rest. And leave room in the bags, we'll need it."

When Billy got home they similarly told him to pack, they didn't say why, but he'd seen and heard enough himself in the last few months that he was glad to be leaving. They were simply fed up of living in terror just for living normal lives.

"Are things ready out there?", Barbara asked nervously, "We weren't planning to leave for another month."

"Most of its ready, we'll be fine. Some veggies are ready right now but we'll have to go easy on them for the first few weeks. Besides, now we can get ready faster with more hands to help. Only the gardens and stores need work, more needs to be planted, things like that. I'll have to make a couple more return trips then we're gone for good."

Hey

Relieved, she started packing her things. Aaron left a note for Matt at the drop point telling him what was happening and letting him know he'd be back in

a few weeks to a month, and telling him exactly where the laptop would be hidden in case he needed it or it had to be moved to a safer location. Then at home he wrapped the laptop with desiccant into multiple layers of plastic, sealed it into a packing case and buried it under the house for safekeeping.

The next morning all four of them left together to the National Park. He drove the Car off the road into the bushes where it wouldn't be noticed and helped the family prepare for the 2 day trek through the Forest, checking their clothing and pack straps. There was one last thing he had for Billy and Cassandra to hold; he gave Billy the 9mm rifle and Cassy the .22 rifle. Barbara looked surprised, then relaxed. As young as they were, they knew how to safely handle firearms. He brought out another 9mm rifle for himself that he'd kept off site ever since the clock began running down. He and Barbara carried a pistol each. As usual he chose a different start position to the previous walks and they made their way along a compass bearing to familiar territory, then headed west away from the completely failed civilization. They probably could have done the walk in a day but he wasn't pushing it, there was no hurry.

The Children were a lot happier than they were to be leaving everything behind, but then they're always more adaptable and accepting of changes, he thought. Their enthusiasm was boundless, as well as their energy. Barbara and Aaron were constantly calling to them not to get too far ahead. And he'd thought he was fit! Barbara was visibly nervous and wasn't talking much as they walked through the Forest, homing on the GPS coordinates as always. She was upset at yesterday's events and more upset that they'd had to drop everything and leave just to be safe. Her friends and family had moved so often and for the same reasons that she'd lost contact with some, and now she was just another of the 'disappeared'. Alive and safe, yes, but it didn't make her feel any easier. When he returned briefly to pick up the last of the supplies and load the final storage containers, he'd post no-return-address letters from her and the kids explaining that they were safe and not to worry, that was all that could be done.

"I know what you're worried about, you'll be fine", he reassured her, "We know everything we need; the only difference is we have to think more about things and take more care, things are basic."

"Are we meant to live out here?", she thought out loud as she looked out over endless miles of Forest.

"Our ancestors did well for themselves in much worse places than this, so will we. Think of it as an advanced hunting trip, almost everything's ready, it's just the Food situation that needs some work."

"During the meeting months ago, you mentioned Food, Shelter and Water. But what about Clothing?", she cheekily inquired.

"Well, when you think about it, we'd be fine without that."

She hit his arm, as he'd expected her to.

"Don't even think about that one!", she grinned.

"We're hardly the first to do this, I think there'll be many, many others doing the same all over the country", he said to her.

Barbara paused and glanced back the way they'd come.

"Don't look back, there's nothing there. The way I think of it is, out here we've got a chance, back there we've got none at all"

"What about all the others in those cities?"

"If there was an organized Resistance, we wouldn't be here", he replied. "People can only take so much, and then they'll make their own choices, if they haven't already. Come on."

Of course he didn't mention his other motive, that if the absolute worst came to the worst, they were far, far better off dying out there than at the hands of Gang members.

"Just how much more can the country take?", Barbara muttered aloud.

He related his thoughts about food supply and demand, and how the people who produced were apparently being culled in favor of those who didn't. That situation was an absolute red flag for very near future disaster, for which he was grateful his family were out of there.

"Whether for good or for bad, I think the situation will change very quickly and in the near future", he admitted. That was all he could say.

Sleep came slowly that night in the tent by the River, with the kids chatting till late nearby in their tent and unfamiliar forest sounds keeping Barbara awake too. He remembered his first night alone there; too many unresolved primal fears were out here for unused city folk. Hers was meeting Bears in the night, and he repeatedly assured her that in all the time there he hadn't spotted any claw marks on trees or discolored droppings from Bears eating their favorite berries. For that matter the on line park guides said there weren't any, but he'd always played it safe with stored food just in case, it was a huge area to be certain about anything. He hadn't seen any sign of large Cats either, but there certainly was an endless supply of Deer and small game around. There were Deer tracks everywhere and on every trip he'd caught glimpses of them through the trees. Once he'd even stumbled upon two grazing near the river. He didn't know who was more startled; thinking back later, it was like they'd been instantaneously hit by an electric shock and powerful hind legs had instantly sent them bounding off through the trees. Very alert and jittery creatures, he thought. Near the main roads the park employed professional hunters to thin the Deer herds and prevent starvation, that wasn't the case out here.

He woke to the kids chatter and the warm sunlight on the side of the tent, for once the inveterate early riser had slept in. He allowed himself a few more minutes of rest before rising, he didn't have to worry about their safety from outside influences, and best of all he wasn't alone there any more. He took a towel a short distance along the river, stripped to his underwear then

jumped into the water. The cold made him gasp, and instantly he was fully awake and alive once more. He'd taught himself to love early morning cold showers and had inured himself to the cold to some extent when he was young for that reason, not to mention it was good Army training.

"You're crazy, Dad!", Billy remarked on his return. He just grinned.

As it was overcast he safely lit a small fire near the water and heated some food for the family before they packed and moved on.

"How much further is it?" Barbara asked, looking more and more concerned as they kept on walking through miles of untamed Forest.

"Another 3 hours", he casually replied. He didn't want to say "8 miles", that might've shocked her. They'd take their time getting there, and they'd see the effort was worth the wait.

As they approached the last low ridge and finally entered familiar territory, he started pointing out landmarks to them.

"Are we there yet... are we there yet?", the calls from Billy and Cassie were coming every half mile or so now.

"Just over the hill" he said.

"Welcome home everyone", he said when the log cabin finally came into view through the woods.

"Oh, Wow!", went Cassy, then both kids ran ahead to check it out.

"My god, that's a lot bigger than I thought it'd be!", said Barbara in shock. He flicked her arm with a fingernail.

"You didn't think I wasted several months building a tin shack, did you?"

"You didn't let me see any photos after the first few so I didn't know WHAT to think..."

"That's my bed! No, that's MY bed!", Cassy and Billy were already arguing inside as they reached the cabin.

Aaron scooped up Barbara in his arms, ignored her protests and carried her through the doorway.

"That's something I've been looking forward to doing for a long time", he commented as he let her down.

Her eyes went wide as she surveyed the interior for the first time.

"I can see we're going to be happy here", she finally said.

"There's a still lot to do, the fireplace isn't finished, I have to build shelving, a storage room for the tools and everything, but it's a start. If there's one thing I can't stand its tools inside the living space"

He was pleased Barbara liked it; he was half expecting her to be unhappy about the hard packed earth floor and mats. One thing at a time...

They dumped their things inside, and then as Barbara rested from the days walk to get there and the kids eagerly explored the area, he started that nights dinner for the family. The kids knew the safety rules, as long as they stayed together, left trail markers behind them, didn't travel more than a few miles away till they familiarized themselves with the area, and kept their personal GPS units, a map and a firearm with them at all times, they were free to explore all they liked. A hand held radio was next to useless in this country as well as being a huge risk, but the sound of a gunshot would travel a long way. They also knew not to take undue risks like climbing trees, slippery rocks or cliffs, help was practically impossible out here if something went badly wrong.

In between waiting for Fish to bite at the river, he mused over the kids. Don't they ever run out of energy? What does it take to tire them out? He couldn't remember ever having had that much energy when he was young. Give them a few days out here and they'd see...

Several hours later he'd caught 2 nice fish and filleted them. Back at the house he unfolded a set of the plastic solar panels then lightly cooked and shredded the fish, mixed them with a couple of potatoes he'd dug from the gardens and mashed them together, added half a chopped onion, salt, pepper, parsley, made the mix into small cakes, dipped them in flour then fried them. Fish Cakes... Yum! Who says backwoods food is boring? All you need is a bit more imagination and time, he thought. Before it got dark he went hunting and shot and prepared a rabbit for breakfast the next morning.

The next morning it was clear and cool outside. Aaron was awake before dawn as always, he was tempted to wake Barbara too but decided to let her sleep in as for the first time out there he allowed himself the luxury of watching the sun rising, lighting up the Sky in brilliant red then yellow on the clouds, then fading and reappearing just before the Sun rose, lighting up a thin layer of mist by the river. As soon as it was light enough for the solar cells he dug up a couple of potatoes and a small lettuce, washed them, and mashed the potatoes with shredded lettuce leaves. The rest of the family slowly began waking to the smell of food as he fried yesterday's meat.

They immediately started on the jobs necessary to live out there. The gardens were the first priority, after 2 unattended weeks they needed weeding and some of the plants needed trimming and watering. Expanding them and preparing for the next seasons crops were an immediate priority. The kids wanted to do the planting themselves, while digging out the tree stumps in the way of the gardens and around the house and expanding the fenced area was a job he and Billy shared. For the first few weeks he intended keeping the kids busy for a part of each day, work was the best remedy for any shock, and seeing the results of their labor would make it all worthwhile for them. As long as they saw a purpose for what they were doing, their natural enthusiasm would carry them through. They were still somewhere between their old and new lives and not entirely comfortable with the fact they were breaking the law merely by missing out on school. The only comment made was by Barbara, she remarked that it was nice to be doing things for themselves. She'd finally gotten over her nervousness and was settling in quickly now she was convinced they'd be comfortable. In addition there were lots of little and not-so-little jobs to do, like hanging up the brass wind chimes that used to be a fixture on their house before they'd taken them down so they wouldn't be stolen for scrap metal, making more furniture as needed and starting on the flooring slats. Another job he relished was attaching mountings for hammocks under the overhanging roof for the sweltering summer nights they were now enduring. Before the cities went sour people would sleep outdoors on chairs and balconies in the summer heat, something they couldn't even dream of doing now.

All their lives the kids had been brought up to think of others and were included in household chores as well as family decisions. His and Barbara's approach was "come on, lets have some fun" or "my turn", never "it's your turn". He strongly detested silent treatments or demands to do jobs, he didn't regard that as family building, and the kids in turn knew not to mistake Aarons benevolence for complacency. When things needed doing, they were done first, and then came family time. That's the way it always had been in their household. Billy had once pushed his luck and insisted it wasn't his job to take out the garbage, so Aaron lovingly emptied the rubbish sack onto his bed. Billy got the message. Talk softly, but carry a big stick, he thought.

The only job he wasn't insisting the kids take part in out there was the cleaning of small game in preparation for eating. He was saving larger prey like Deer for later when they were more used to life out there. Unlike the Pioneers, he wanted to let them get used to that job in their own time instead of forcing it upon them. You can't turn city kids into country kids overnight, one step at a time he thought. There was enough stored food that they'd be fine without freshly killed meat for a time if need be, and there were of course the storage containers. He'd programmed their location into the GPS units along with every crossing and every turn along the easiest route there.

He didn't even ask them to watch, they insisted on it the first time as he dug a hole for the offal, donned steel mesh safety gloves then cut the stomach of a rabbit open full length, cut the windpipe and sinews and dropped the insides out. Even before he'd finished the cutting, Cassy gagged and Billy turned and ran. He'd expected it to be the other way around. Girls must have stronger stomachs than Boys, he thought. Of course they stayed away the next few times, then slowly they began creeping up and watching once more, at first from a distance then closer and finally they stood next to him as he worked. All the time Aaron casually chatted with them, pointing out anatomy, gutting and skinning techniques and edible parts so they didn't regard it as a punishment rather than as a lesson, there was no obligation for them to stay and watch and they were free to leave if they wanted.

"Notice how they don't have much meat in them compared to what you buy in the city? Out here small Animals don't have time to laze about and fatten up, for them it's a constant struggle for survival too. The larger animals just eat all the time. That's one of the reasons man Domesticated animals", was part of one such lecture.

A far more important lesson he taught was to make sure that no animal ever suffered, ever. That was one of the reasons he'd insisted on Billy becoming a crack shot, the hours they'd spent on the firing range hadn't just been a game. When they shot, they weren't just to identify the target, but to aim for the neck or head for a instant one-shot kill. He reminded them how in news reports you saw the same basic mistake made over and over; hunters not taking the time to properly identify the target and shooting their own partner, or using the gun sight instead of binoculars to check a possible target. So a big safety rule he impressed on the kids was to immediately stop a hunt if they lost sight of their hunting partner, not to get their rifle ready to fire until they're about to shoot, and even then not until they'd double checked where their partner was. It only took a few seconds. And he impressed on them that their ammunition was a finite and irreplaceable commodity, once it was gone that was it, it was traps and snares from then on, so they had to make sure every shot counted, even if it meant missing out on a possible target.

Finally Billy was the first to cross the line and asked for the gloves and knife to try it out for himself. After the first few weeks they were almost

used to it and even imitating each other being sick as they worked.

Using every resource was important out there, he made sure to keep the animals' fat for use as tallow in candles. They smelled a bit but worked fine with reeds, string and thin sticks. The preferred way was to boil or steam the fat from bones, but it would do.

And he was looking forward to Tanning his first pelts, his Father had told him it was a job even Children could do but it took a bit of practice. They'd already cleaned, stretched and dried a few "green" pelts, which were unusable for clothing and had to be kept dry else they'd decay quickly. He didn't know how long they'd have to remain out here, but they might as well prepare for the eventuality. Their clothes wouldn't last forever, and nothing was better for warmth and comfort than hides. He'd practice on the smaller pelts first then move up to Deer.

Other lessons were more subtle. Billy and Cassie came in on the second afternoon grumbling because they didn't have swimming clothes when they wanted to cool off in the stream. Ah, City kids... he thought. Barbara and Aaron managed to hold back from laughing. He left it to her to explain it to them.

"You don't need them."

"Huh!?", was their instant startled reply.

"Well, how many people you see around us?" she continued.

They started to catch on and grinned at each other.

"What are you waiting for? Take your time and dry off in the sun afterward", she continued.

The next second they were racing out the door and down to the stream.

After they were gone, he had to comment "Was there an ulterior motive in getting them out of the house for an extended period?"

"You're slow today", was her reply.

"I thought so."

He grabbed her and slung her over his shoulder.

"Dammit! Put me down! Put me down! I'm NOT a Cave girl!", Barbara protested as her fists pounded his back.

"Ug!" he replied, and carried her into the bedroom.

A few days later Aaron and Billy were digging the gardens while Cassy planted more of her precious seedlings, when Billy remarked that all the cut down trees around them didn't look good and were a waste of resources, and what did he intend to do with them?

"Well, they're not going to stay there, once things are settled you and I are going to be building with them"

"Oh, Cool!", said Billy.

"I can't stand having all the tools and supplies in the house, so somewhere down here you and I are going to be building a smaller house, and you two will be able to sleep in there if you want a change."

As the list of urgent jobs dwindled and they settled into the daily routines of work first, play and relaxation later, they went for long walks exploring the area and continuing the survival lessons that'd been interrupted by their abrupt departure. He pointed out edible and useful plants, roots and berries, replacing theory with practice. Some were immediately edible; a few needed preparation to remove natural poisons first. During the many hours he'd researched he'd written copious notes into the margins of the books; favored plant locations, whether they were tree dwelling, undergrowth or light seekers, if they preferred to be by running water or in swampy ground. He'd printed photographs off the Net to supplement the book drawings, which came in very useful in identifying species.

Honing natural instincts was another thing he strongly encouraged them to do, constantly watching, listening and smelling their surroundings. One of the little things he'd been training himself to do lately was distinguishing the different smells from trees. After even a few days practice it was amazing what you could detect when you only took notice of what was around you. Even when driving through the city and countryside with the window down he'd found you could easily distinguish the trees and shrubs you were passing. All you had to do was take notice and lots of little things jumped out at you.

He told them how Deer are so attuned to their surroundings that stalking them took skill and staying upwind of them so they wouldn't take flight. They were known to 'jump the string' at the sudden sound of a bow. When White men came to America they quickly learned that the American Indians had the same keen, animal-like attributes, most likely from constant warfare and struggle to survive. There were indications early European man was the same; Otzi, the Iron age hunter recovered frozen in the Alps had an arrowhead under his shoulder which caused his death, it had entered from below, suggesting he'd ducked and turned at the sound. The big Cats were even better predators he told them, the Indians didn't call them 'ghosts' for no reason, they were so stealthy and silent, even when running, that often even when you were alerted by animals freeing the predator approaching them, you only glimpsed movement or a tail swishing. They very slowly and silently approached their prey until they were close enough to pounce, unless their prey was unknowingly already running away from where they were hidden, and then they pounced anyway, knowing their prey wouldn't hear them in time.

Paying attention to animals was another tip he gave them, he told them how they often alerted you if a predator was nearby. Bird migration patterns told their ancestors when seasons were on their way and likely led them to other lands and even tiny islands in the middle of the oceans. He'd purchased a book on identifying animal tracks and following them, which he suggested they read and practice, especially if they were going hunting bigger game later on.

He'd developed an admiration for 'Otzi' and his skills of late. He was found with the remnants of glowing charcoals wrapped in maple leaves in a birch-bark pouch, the equivalent of modern day matches, and the outermost of his three layers of clothing for the high altitude cold was a grass outer cloak garment showing his preparation for inclement weather as the shingling effect would make rain run off instead of soaking in as would happen to leather. The feathers on his arrows showed they understood how to make an arrow rotate and fly straight, and his bow was made of yew, whose superior qualities weren't rediscovered until the middle ages.

He and Barbara also went out for lots of private walks in the Forest. Along the riverbanks, up hills and through untouched tree-filled valleys that people might not have seen for decades, perhaps never. She was constantly on the lookout for warm and scenic locations near the cabin, pausing at each place she liked for minutes at a time and examining the surroundings before taking his hand again and continuing their casual aimless stroll around the area. She was settling into their new life and was absolutely glad to be away from the cesspit their former town had become, the little sparks she radiated when she was happy were returning now that she wasn't constantly stressing about leaving the house by herself. She didn't notice until he mentioned it to her that she was wearing brighter colors once more that complimented her wispy Black hair and blue eyes.

Sometimes during their walks he had the feeling that there was something else she wanted to ask or to tell him, maybe both. There wasn't any reason to ask outright and maybe spoil the mood, he'd let her keep her little secrets for when she was good and ready. She was a firm believer in waiting till she was sure of things and the time was right, when people weren't frantically busy and worn out.

While crossing the hills some three miles from the cabin she paused once more to admire the view. The day was just clear enough to see the distant mountains through the trees, and there was a good view of a segment of the river also. Overhead, the breeze rustled the leaves but all was still at ground level, the leeward side acted to funnel the wind over the hill, and the ridge itself was largely devoid of undergrowth. On a good day he'd have gladly set up camp here, but if the wind were from the wrong direction it'd be mercilessly exposed to the elements. Barbara seemed satisfied, nodded to herself and took a note of the location on the GPS, as she'd similarly recorded a grassy location further along the river at a short section of rapids surrounded by magnificent fully grown trees.

While fishing and on long walks around the area, he told the kids things the school system never did any more, accounts about the early pioneers and western cowboys, the great survival stories and adventures from long ago he'd learned from researching, stories that were slowly being wiped from memory and never mentioned in the ever more dulled-down school textbooks. When Dictators took over countries the first thing they did was to remove all the privately held weapons to deny the population the ability to resist tyranny. Then they stole their history by rewriting it, denying them their old heroes and inventing new ones out of criminals and even killers who'd contributed nothing or less than nothing to the long-term wellbeing of the nation but who suited the government and political climate, while omitting their crimes from news articles and educational texts fed to unwitting children. Both processes were well advanced in America, albeit on a longer time scale. Orwell had once summed up the process brilliantly with his "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past"

Aaron told his Children how History and luck favor the brave, people who took chances, explored and pushed the limits of what was possible. He told them about the still-occupied Scandinavian towns built of stone on slopes and covered over with soil for added protection against the cold, looking after a time like part of the hillside until you looked more closely.

"That sounds like Hobbiton!", Cassy immediately exclaimed.

"Yes, that's probably where Tolken got the idea from", he replied.

There were the Vikings, who'd colonized Greenland before the climate changed and also traveled to parts of America. There were Indian legends of White people who'd visited parts of the country, backed up with discoveries of old European writings on stone, artifacts and earthworks and stone buildings found in places, and there was evidence early Europeans were there much earlier still, particularly Kennewick man, who when facially reconstructed looked like the captain of a sci-fi series. The Spirit Cave Mummy found in the 1940's was 9000 years old, and also had strongly European features and clothing. All around the Pacific Ocean were oral tribal histories of European visitors and even Skeletons found in buried caves dressed in ancient European style leather clothing. There were ancient stone circles and buildings in the style of the Celts, many of which had been declared off-limits or destroyed in modern times and research into them filed away and forgotten. Even University researchers seemed determined to ignore evidence that went against the politically correct line that nobody had been there before the Government-recognized Native peoples.

He told them how advancement and technology happens through both chance discoveries and dedicated research over time. There were 190 years between the invention of the first battery and man walking on the moon. The ancient Egyptians were starting to experiment with electricity and perhaps electroplating before their civilization decayed, and the ancient Greeks and the Romans achieved an extraordinary degree of art, architecture and metallurgy before the same happened to them. If someone back then had made the right observations and discoveries, who knows what might have happened. Of course it could never be proven, but he had the feeling that had the Roman civilization continued just a few hundred years longer, they might've landed on the moon by 500AD.

Above all, he told them how History showed that change could happen very quickly, there were countries which had been in a far worse situation than America which had extricated themselves and risen to be world powers in just a few years, all it took was the right leaders coming to power then making the right decisions and doing what had to be done.

He told them about the first American colonists, who'd left in poorly provisioned ships from England and Europe to America. Many died on route from poor food, sanitation and disease, and it wasn't uncommon for many or all the Children to die before they reached land. He'd found a pioneers account of how the Children on one ship hated the sailor whose sad job it was to sew their friends, brothers and sisters into weighted canvas sacks and drop them over the side. A young girl spoke with the sailor and found he hated the job too, he was as human as the rest of them, and she became friends with him and made him promise that when she died, he wouldn't drop her overboard too. That was one promise he didn't have to break, she died just before they reached land and was buried onshore. The terrible thing was, the colonists knew that would happen but they set out anyway, conditions for the poor were so bad in England that it was preferable to staying. They were mostly laborers with little or no farming expertise, they'd received some instruction before leaving but with inadequate provisions and absolutely no on site preparation beforehand the result was as could be expected, they died in droves from exposure, disease and starvation before houses were built and gardens grew. Often as few as one in ten survived the first few years, and after seeing for themselves some of the conditions they endured it was entirely possible there were settlements where nobody survived at all. They wouldn't have been remembered or recorded; there were a lot of forgotten ghosts in history. Billy and Cassy were visibly shocked to hear about that, the education system had only told them about the losses to the native peoples, never those of the Europeans or why they'd come

in the first place.

When the early colonists started to expand across the country, some weren't satisfied just with supporting their families of course, they wanted to be much more for themselves and their descendants. Free to do what White people did best, namely to produce, they selected and bred vast cattle empires and ranches, and the Cowboys and Ranchers who emerged built a reputation of their own. There was little control then over the newly tamed areas, but there were still rules, things you just didn't do. Even in the wild prospectors camps, you could let off steam and fight and drink all day and all night long, but peoples tents and houses were considered sacrosanct, you never entered without permission, absolutely never. Women were absolutely protected too, there had been many on the spot shootings when that line had been crossed.

Cassie liked the story of Jane, who showed expertise with shooting and horse riding before the age of 10. Then both her parents took sick and died, so she took the very first job she saw, namely a mule driver. She proved adept at what she did and became an army scout who gained a reputation for never hesitating to join in gunfights. Once she came across a stagecoach being chased by Indians who'd shot the driver. The men in the coach didn't want to climb out and take over, so she jumped aboard and did what had to be done. He emphasized that last part to them. She earned her nickname 'Calamity Jane' by not hesitating to ride in under fire to rescue an army captain whose group was being overwhelmed by Indians. On one occasion in a saloon a man persisted in making sexual advances toward her despite her warning him to stop, so she shot him dead on the spot.

And Billy liked the story of Hugh Glass, the extraordinarily tough frontiersman who'd stumbled upon a Bear tending its cubs and was promptly attacked. He fought it with a knife and barely won but was mauled to an inch of his life in the struggle. Left for dead by his colleagues who were worried about impending Indian attacks, he woke several days later without any of his equipment. Reaching behind, he could feel his exposed rib bones on his back. Regardless, he reset his broken leg and little by little made his way several hundred miles to the nearest Fort.

It was very difficult to be truly independent out there he told them, of course you can live on just what's out there, but it's basic with not much room for imagination. There were things that couldn't easily be made in the wilderness, like ammunition, seeds, nails, salt and flour, as well as the little luxuries people wanted like spices to brighten their food and books to read, so people still had to trade or work to buy them. That was where people like the fur trappers came in, who went way out into the wilderness to provide the city folk with furs for furniture and clothing, other alternatives were breeding stock and planting more than you needed and selling the excess.

"I hope they skinned them before they were cold, it's a lot harder then", Billy casually remarked.

They were learning.

"Why did they stop doing that, did the animals die out?" Cassie asked.

"Not a chance, the wildlife population would've grown back in a few years or less. No, there wasn't any money to be made any more, not unless you brought in a really large number of pelts"

"Sometimes when I think about it, I don't know if things were so much harder then as practical, long hours and distances to travel, things like that. People lived hard and played hard, you've read about the saloons and gambling

halls of course. There was no Government assistance then, if you didn't belong, you left and never came back or else you died. People still brought up large families without much difficulty though, wages were low but money was worth a lot more then, a good wage for a working man was a dollar a day, a house cost only a few hundred dollars, and predators were dealt with on the spot, some things just weren't tolerated in any way shape or form then, and they shouldn't be today either. That's what's gone wrong with society; it's why the cities are so messed up. Any even half-civilized society has some rules which are broken at the cost of severe penalty. That's where the West has really badly messed up, we've let that line be blurred and pulled back in the name of 'Tolerance' and have kept pushing back the boundaries ever since."

"What would have happened back then if kids at school had stood around asking for 'spare money'?", Billy asked.

"They'd have been beaten by the other kids and the teachers, then when they got home they'd have been beaten again by their parents for shaming the family, and if they were too sore to go to school the next day they'd have been beaten yet again by their parents."

"What if someone abused you just for looking at them?"

"The teachers probably would've told them to wear a big sign saying 'I AM A LOSER' and made to stand in front of the class for an hour."

"How about if a Gang got together and started beating up other kids?"

"If the teachers didn't deal with it, the parents of the other kids would have come into school and beaten them up, and when they got home those kids parents would've been waiting for them too, most likely with big sticks, for shaming the family"

"What if someone abused you for your skin color?"

"That was a BIG no-no back then, both for Whites and Blacks. They'd have been beaten by the other kids, then by their teachers, and then by their neighbors, and lastly by their parents, and they'd never have done a thing like that again."

"Wow!", Billy replied.

"That's how justice worked until the 60's, all parents felt responsible for making sure their neighborhoods kids behaved, that's the way the sense of community spirit worked. At least one good thing about living back then, you knew where you stood and that there were clear consequences, and nobody claimed they were victims of 'oppression' for it, they would've been laughed at."

"That's all they ever talked about in school", Billy grumbled, "A boy in my class told them slavery ended 160 years ago, and they beat him up, then the teachers made him say sorry in front of the whole class."

Aaron winced at the thought of that abuse of power.

"Let me guess, your teachers didn't tell them that millions of people died in the Civil war so they could be free, or that they were enslaved by their own people?"

"No, they just said we're to blame for it."

"I bet they also didn't tell you that when the British stopped the slave trade, the Africans who benefited from it rioted, or that there are more slaves in Africa right now than there ever was at any one time in the US, did they?"

"All they ever talked about at school was how they're affected today and that's why we owe them reparations."

"The slaves in Africa today will never get reparations or anything else", he scoffed, "And that's the modern answer to everything, someone else is always at fault for your problems, it's just an excuse never to take responsibility for anything. They said the same thing when I was in school, too. People come to this country from horrific backgrounds all the time and set up businesses and do just fine, but these people still blame everyone else for something that didn't happen to them over a century ago and use that as their excuse for getting nowhere their entire lives."

"Real losers!", remarked Billy.

"That they are", he replied, "A few decades ago they wanted an education but couldn't get it. And now that they can, they don't want it, they only want to live on the state and be criminals."

"The people at school didn't do any work and shoved us around and still wanted us to look up to them", Billy added.

"Well, they weren't brought to Europe in chains, but they act exactly the same way there too" Aaron commented.

"Why do they do that?", Billy asked.

"That's because they've no intention of fitting into a normal society. You can thank the welfare system for that, we shouldn't be supporting people who want to live like that. In years past certain behavior caused instant expulsion, now we're only allowed to put up with it."

Even decades ago the same trends were visible as were happening now, the social engineers complained about the lack of good schools and were always demanding funds to rebuild the ones destroyed by the inhabitants. They also encouraged the gang youths to leave the main cities and bussed them into well maintained schools elsewhere, where they promptly continued their sub-human behavior and destroyed the environment in exactly the same way they'd done at their previous schools. And the social engineers never learned or did anything effective to combat the resulting terror.

"I'd like to see them live out here", said Cassy.

"They wouldn't", Aaron chuckled, "And it'd be all our fault that they starved."

"Then they'd claim Oppression and ask for Reparations", Billy joked.

"I'll bet the Rabbit population around the house is feeling a bit oppressed right now", Aaron added.

They all laughed at that, after what the kids had been through in their school they needed the offbeat humor.

"Who did this to our country, Dad?", Billy pointedly asked.

"I don't know, Son. I've been wondering about that a lot myself. I used to think things just happened the way they did, but too many things have been allowed to happen that shouldn't have been."

Now that Billy had made him think about it, he and everyone else were at least subtly aware all their lives that things had been happening in the background in politics and society, changes for the worse had been gradually imposed on them. He'd been too busy earning a living, juggling a social life and responsibilities to his family to take more than cursory notice of them. Who indeed, he was starting to wonder. Nobody benefited, nobody, from the destruction of productive nations. It just didn't make sense. Everything had a cause and effect, every war a victor, someone always gained in the long run. Things to ponder...

"Are things ever going to get better?", Cassy asked.

"I really don't know, Cass. All we can do right now is wait and see... Come on, if the weathers clear enough we'll see the mountains from the top of this ridge."

Night time was another special time he told the kids, it wasn't something to be afraid of, though caution never went astray. He left a candle burning by the house to light the way home and in moonlight took then down to the river and pointed out the little things you never saw in the city, the faintly glowing mushrooms and toadstools, fireflies flitting about, and even a couple of glow worms in the riverbank. Out there the stars were much brighter than in the city, some were almost like searchlights, especially Sirius, whose light reflected in bright blue flashes in the water. He pointed out the constellations and the pole star to help them set a course at night if need be, then they all laid down on towels with blankets at the top of the gardens to watch the free fireworks show that nature provided nightly, the occasional shooting star and the man made satellites silently passing over. His gaze went down to the far horizon, faintly glowing at one point from far off city lights. So they weren't completely away from everything, not quite. Using the powerful night vision the Landscape and Sky were even more impressive, they could easily see animals casually wandering about in the false security of night and stars down to 9th magnitude. There was something not quite right about the ground, even without a moon in the sky he could clearly see uneven light and dark areas outlined in the green phosphor amidst the dull flashes of cosmic ray strikes. Suddenly he realized he was looking at the hugely amplified shadows of Venus and Sirius being cast on the ground. Cassy spotted a high altitude and barely visible Satellite fading in and out of visibility, most likely a discarded rocket booster slowly tumbling, and they were following it as it slowly meandered its way down to the horizon when Aaron saw, or thought he saw, a faint flash of light from the low hills 5 miles away across the river. His first thought was that it was a distant aircraft, but no, it was definitely below the black line of the horizon, it only lasted a couple of seconds before fading and wasn't repeated. The more he thought about it, the more he thought it might've been a nearby Firefly tricking him, but it kept nagging at him. He mentioned it to Barbara later in bed as they fell asleep together, and she agreed they'd have to take a look out that way sometime.

Despite everything they'd been through, it was still a beautiful world out there with limitless potential, he told them on another Forest walk. Their ancestors enjoyed life, as short and brutish as it tended to be, but they knew

how to LIVE; they socialized and feasted at every possible occasion. Aaron had often wondered why people today didn't do the same; it was as though dour people who had nothing to look forward to and didn't take much notice of the bigger picture of what happened around them were needed in modern life. Many of the festivities today originated back then, they'd been taken by succeeding religion in an effort to make people forget their past. They wrote numerous journals, they celebrated the seasons and the solstices, and that was one of the reasons they built the stone circles, it was a tremendously knowledgeable and strong society which banded together to make those. Their ancestors believed every family member was important and equal, that was part of what made their societies and families so strong and durable. The ancient Egyptian tomb writings also similarly stressed family unity. Women and children had their voices and input too, that was why he'd always included Billy and Cassy in family decisions like where to go for holiday trips, he admitted. If today's feminists wanted to know what equality was, they should look to their own ancestors, he pointedly remarked to Cassy. They both chuckled at that.

There were more lessons in their ancestors lifestyles, he told them. As is typical of White people they weren't satisfied with being nomadic hunter-gatherers as the media tended to portray, some wanted to be much, much more. The Vikings and Celts weren't afraid of life's hardships and death, they laughed at them instead. Living in fear of death is no way to live, and it most definitely wasn't for them, they considered it a natural part of life. They had strong rules for right and wrong, but hell was a completely foreign concept to them. What they accomplished in life and the manner of their passing were far more important than a nebulous afterlife, they lived and fought for the present. Considering the difficulties they faced, they were likely the greatest adventurers and explorers mankind had ever known. They didn't set out across Oceans and along hostile coastlines and rivers in their wooden long ships and sneer in the face of vast distances, storms and Ice to explore new lands without an extremely positive outlook and desire for better lives, and their families were right there with them. There was evidence they'd traveled further than America in both directions, there was evidence as far a field as China, Japan and South America of their presence long ago.

It was succeeding religion that began the decline of modern society he said, it taught that women were second class citizens because of a mythical crime thousands of years before, thereby instantly demeaning half the family. Their ancestors worshiped life, whereas the new religion taught fear of death instead, sapping peoples will to resist and possibly hastening the end of empires.

And in more modern times the family unit itself seemed to be under direct attack, despite or because of the acknowledged fact that it was the basis of a societies and the entire countries moral strength. That was one of the reasons why in the old days a girls parents might take many years to give their approval to a suitor, they wanted to be sure it would be a good marriage, and why sex before marriage was so frowned upon. People instinctively and by experience knew that one parent families removed half a growing person's backup and support. The result was huge numbers of troubled kids being dumped into the welfare system for life. They only had to remember how many messed-up single parent kids were at their school to know how badly society could be without both parents to set them up.

It wasn't just families which had declined, but peoples very will to resist. He told them how since before the beginning of recorded civilization it used to be that men were taught right from their youngest days to stand fast if called upon to fight, every able bodied male knew it was their duty to drop everything and join in if their community was threatened. And woe betide any

man who didn't take up the call when asked, he was shunned for life. With some enemies, the men were killed and the rest of the family enslaved or worse, which when they thought about it was similar to the situation in American cities today. All through history people celebrated and honored those who had gone out of their way and stood side by side with their neighbors against a common enemy, and in the old days the women often watched and encouraged them as they fought, telling their men not to deliver them into slavery if they began to falter. Some cultures even came up with the idea of a special place in the afterlife you could only enter by dying in combat.

In complete contrast to that, the succeeding religion first gave people the idea of a fiery afterlife, and then decreed that for anyone opposing them even in thought. The concept went completely against the previous life and earth-based pagan religions, and had to have been thought up by a truly twisted and sick person who'd planned the effect in advance. He wondered if that was the true reason for the new religions strong edict against suicide, so men were even more reluctant to fight in defense of their country and family unless the church approved, or better yet, led the way.

The deterrence against the will to resist had reached its peak in western society; the entire western world was now taught tolerance, respect and humility for those who had none, right from the very first days at school. People were now taught that it was wrong to fight, the only enemy people were now permitted to oppose and fight at every turn were those 'racists' who opposed the destruction of their country, and that even wanting to live among your own kind was absolutely wrong. Meanwhile, the people they were taught to respect were allowed to be as racist and violent as they liked. You were expected to stand idly by while your country was slowly invaded and vast swaths of your country became no-go zones, and you were constantly hammered that it was a good thing, when every natural instinct said it was wrong. False and unnatural morals were being imposed by the media, at school, by politicians and even by law. Not just the cities, but every single cornerstone of society appeared to be under direct assault; racial unity and pride, personal pride, societies morals and strengths, its education system, its law enforcement as well as the family unit itself. On top of all that, the freedom of speech untold millions of White men had paid for in blood so that he could say to them what he was saying now was being steadily taken away in the name of safety and control of 'hate speech', which seemed to mean anything which anyone other than White people objected to. Society had been completely warped and turned against itself and all natural order, and all that in just a few generations. The result was there for all to see in the blighted hell the cities had become.

When Aaron thought about it, he was reminded of the way a Virus works, it invades a healthy cell, destroys its immunity and forces it to act against itself, making it reproduce its enemy and finally killing the host cell. What the hell kind of a human Virus could do the exact same thing to an entire modern civilization he wondered, denouncing its resistance to invasion, making its police defend the enemy and harass and arrest the population, weakening it in every way possible, turning its natural instincts against itself, diverting its resources away from its own advancement and making it allow in, nurture and breed incompatible lower peoples who were tearing it to pieces.

Parents used to let kids discover some of life's hard lessons for themselves as they grew up, that luxury couldn't be afforded any more, the stakes were infinitely higher and often fatal. The school system refused to adapt, rather it seemed to do its best to prepare them for a life of failure and reliance on the government in one form or another. It taught only theory and no practical

skill, no life skills, no social skills, no personal pride, no work skills or even how to work. It taught only rights and political conformance, and absolutely no responsibility for actions. It produced students who couldn't read, couldn't spell, couldn't write, knew nothing of history, but were very well informed on false political issues and "biodiversity", and were less and less likely ever to experience a wholly original political thought in their lives that hadn't first been spoon fed to them by the media or school. If it wanted to truly educate kids and prepare them for life, it should have them work in a mine, factory or other menial job for a year or two to show them how things really work, Aaron believed.

Billy and Cassie certainly didn't miss school, for that matter they didn't miss the area they'd lived in, or even Television. There was no positive real-world programming whatsoever on that technological marvel, just continual images of dysfunctional youth doing unsocial things and promoting unhealthy purely consumer lifestyles, never youth showing pride in themselves and their appearance, showing respect for others outside their group, planning for the future or doing anything practical.

There were plenty of other things they could do both during the day and at night. It was true; kids make their own fun when left to their own devices; swimming, reading, playing games, listening to the radio, exploring the area and practicing what they'd learned. More than once either Billy or Cassy had thrown a bucket of water over the other in the gardens, causing in an instant running water fight. "Just don't damage the plants" was his or their mothers' reaction, and they let them have all the fun they wanted. Cassy was quickly becoming a good Chess player, they left the board set up and each time the other player returned home another move was made. They'd explored the stream in both directions looking for rapids, waterfalls and fishing spots, all the way to where it branched from the main river, which they reported was really deep, fast moving and filled with big rocks at the place they'd seen it.

Both of them liked watching and tracking the wildlife around them, especially in the dark with night vision when they were more likely to come into the open. Tracking skills are just extremely good observation skills combined with knowledge he'd told them; spotting and interpreting bent blades of grass, a displaced pebble or faint scrape mark on dried earth or rock. Several times they'd played a game of trying to get as close as possible to animals without being noticed, which as they quickly discovered wasn't easy when they were up against the natural masters of that game. He'd taught them a few hunting tricks his father had related to him over a campfire, among them that some animals are not only extremely sensitive to smell, they're very sensitive to low sound frequencies which travel much further than higher frequencies, so whispering was the only way to go. Despite knowing that, more often than not they'd slowly work their way toward a Deer, only to find their intended prey already watching them intently as they came over a ridge or peered from behind shrubbery. One time at night Billy very slowly and quietly snuck up behind trees to within a few meters of a couple of Deer, only to have them suddenly bolt from the area.

"You were upwind, they got your scent Billy, you dummy!", was Cassy's response.

As long as the jobs got done, they let others know where they were and took precautions first and foremost in everything they did, that was all that mattered; there were no time constraints or deadlines apart from mealtimes.

It was amazing to see the changes in their outlook in just a short time. They'd been so tired of living in fear, surrounded by a blizzard of hate from

their class and school for being White, and stressed out from being unable to go out or visit nearby friends, that they were starting to show Defensiveness symptoms. Freed from the terror they were quickly blossoming into confident youth. Out here was the school of the Real World, and they loved it.

Three weeks after arriving he'd almost finished compiling the list of needed things and belongings that Barbara and the kids wanted from the house. He was becoming satisfied the family was settled in and safe out here, and it was approaching the time to make hopefully his last visit into the city to do the few things that remained.

Before gathering the letters they'd written to friends and family, he chatted at length with each of the Children in turn. He told Billy that he would be the provider and the protector of the Women for up to a month while he stocked the storage containers. He knew he'd be fine; he was doing well for himself out here. He also complimented his son when he told him that he didn't know if he'd noticed it, but he was twice as strong as when they'd arrived. He'd noticed Billy lifting things which he couldn't before, and also that he'd grown stronger inside, he wasn't complaining about tiredness after work or the lack of modern things any more but just jumping in and doing what had to be done and improvising when he had to. Billy grinned at that. And to Cassy, he told her that she was doing very well with her plants and was very thoughtful in her planning for future crops and requirements, she was becoming good at preparing fish and meat for the family and sometimes giving everyone little surprises at mealtimes. She was learning fast and trying things out, she'd gained a lot of patience for failure and was more relaxed about life, and she was more observant and quick. And she was becoming a mean chess player, although he was also quite sure she was getting help from Billy and their Mother.

Despite all the preparations and his assurances that she'd be fine, Barbara was still nervous about his impending departure to finish the remaining jobs. Several times in the past she'd admitted to a morbid fear of being alone, and being in the middle of a Forest only magnified her fears. He promised to try his damndest to do everything on one trip instead of several as he'd originally planned.

With his departure looming he'd noticed Barbara hadn't been her normal self for several days, and he finally asked what was bothering her.

"The other people in our block didn't go more than a few miles from the roads, why are we so far away in the middle of nowhere?", she asked outright.

"I just wanted some distance between us and the cities, I've had enough of them", he half-explained.

"That's not what I meant Aaron; you've taken us right out into the middle of nowhere, you wouldn't even let me know exactly where the house was. I know you've been up to something, I've seen you working for hours and hours on that old laptop of yours, you didn't do any of the research on this place from the home computer, you always left your mobile phone behind when you came here, and while you were away the last time Matt came around asking about that old computer of yours. Why is it so important all of a sudden? What's going on?"

That took him aback. He stared at her for a long time, trying to think of a reply.

"Okay", he finally said, "You'll find out one way or another, I've been

wanting to tell you for awhile, it's better you hear it from me. Let's talk about it down at the Riverbank."

Seated by the clear bubbling water he explained everything to her, the Virus he was building, the planning for it and what it was theoretically capable of. The rest was easy to guess, why he'd been so discreet about the House location and built it so far away. In major cases the Feds didn't just prey on the perp, they also went for their families in order to try and flush them out.

He'd expected shock, disbelief, a look of terror, screams and begging for him not to do it. He got some of that.

"You mean you've been planning all this time for your family to be on the Worlds most wanted list! How could you do such a thing to us!", she shouted then stormed off up the hill.

"Barbara!" he shouted, and then stopped. He knew better than to follow and try to explain when she was in a rage; he'd have to let her calm down first.

What have I done? He thought to himself. Have I been a fool to even consider such a thing? He didn't care too much for himself; his Wife and Kids safety were the absolute first priority. His own countries future wellbeing was another, he'd always felt that if anyone was in a position to change the way things were for the better, it was their ultimate duty to do it, but at what price to his family?

Half an hour later he was working alone in the Gardens when she came looking for him.

"I'm sorry to drag you into this, I should've told you everything a long time ago", he started to apologize.

"Aaron, how much damage do you think that Virus could do?", she cut him off.

"All going well, Total, and for a long time."

There was a long contemplative silence while she stared at him.

"If it wasn't for the Government, the cities wouldn't be overrun with criminals and we wouldn't have to be here", she finally replied.

"Does this mean I have your approval?"

"Fill the storage containers, then do whatever you have to do", she told him then shuddered. "Then come back to me. Do you promise me that? Don't go off looking for a fight on your own because you'll find it, and I'll have no Husband and the Children will have no Father to come back to us! Promise me you'll do that, Aaron! Right now!"

"Absolutely."

Later that evening in bed she leaned over and whispered to him when the Children were asleep.

"Why, why does it have to be YOU who does that!"

"Someone has to do it, they've been expecting all sorts of attacks from other Governments after what they've done. Maybe they won't see this coming. If we

can't go back to the city, we can at least give the other people a chance. I just hope things don't get too bad for them afterward."

"Aaron, I'm glad we're out of there, whatever happens, I'll stand by you."

"You don't know how much that means to me, Barbara... You know, I should have known better than to try concealing it from you", he added as an afterthought.

"You didn't try very hard."

"Hiding anything from you is just about impossible isn't it Barbara?"

"Of course, I'm a Woman, what do you expect? I've known right from the start something was going on, it's like Men always want us to know when anything's happening, you might as well be putting up signs for us to read."

"No, we grant you that privilege."

Instant punch to the arm.

She chuckled next to him in the darkness.

"Are you sure you'll be alright here for a few weeks?"

"We'll be fine now; we've got plenty of food. Just make sure and bring back more books and magazines to read."

"How will we tell the kids about it?"

"I'll let them know when you're gone."

"They'll be happy I'll bet."

"Of course, everything's an adventure at their age."

"Let's hope it stays that way for them."

"I've put another letter into your backpack to leave at the house. Before you go, rip it up and leave it for the Police to find in the rubbish."

"What's in it?"

"Something to complicate things for them."

She put her arm around him, and they slowly fell asleep together.

He awoke before dawn as always, dressed, kissed her and left a small bunch of flowers on the bed next to her, then took up his backpack and disappeared into the mist by the River to begin the long return trek before the rest of the family woke. He hated long drawn out goodbyes, and he had the strong feeling Barbara preferred it this way too.

Barbara's friends were startled when he turned into the driveway of their former home, so many neighbors had left for good that they didn't really expect to see him again either despite stating he'd return inside a month. They'd kept the house tidy, but the formerly immaculate gardens were unkempt and overgrown. No matter. They'd collected and stored the mail and mowed the lawns in an effort to deter the predators, that was all they could do of course, they were preparing to leave as well. He was lucky, in another week

they'd have been gone themselves, they'd found accommodations in a reasonably safe area of another city. Aaron dug up the laptop and checked it, then went on line using the lounge computer and paid the important bills which'd built up; the power, water, Internet and telephone line. The insurances, licensing fees due, land rates, tax assessments and overdue mortgage payment notices he had the dubious pleasure of throwing unpaid into the trash can.

More than the house had gone downhill, all sorts of little things were happening that weren't just a month ago. People were now carefully checking their property before leaving their houses and making sure they weren't being watched when they arrived home in nice cars. Others were walking around with their entire body language displaying apprehension as they tried to avoid giving any excuse to the fence sitting Gang members hanging around drinking alcohol all day. There was now a constant stream of suspicious Cars driving slowly down the streets checking out individuals and houses, slowing further for the occupants to scream abuse at pedestrians or stare angrily at people in the hope they'd stare back or react. It wasn't just that the neighborhood was leaving or preparing to leave, the whole essence of the place had gone. This was no longer a place anyone normal could live; it was more like the crime-ridden cities of South Africa. If there'd been hesitation to release the Virus before, it was gone now.

The answer phone was filled with messages as expected, many from Barbara's and the kids friends asking after them. There were also a number of silent calls; the caller ID for each indicated the same pay phone for all of them. He guessed it was Matthew, but the area code was wrong. Odd.

He posted his, the Kids' and Barbara's letters as promised then visited the drop point in the reserve down the road from Matt's house. A few centimeters down under loose soil was a letter waiting for him, sealed in waterproof plastic as always. When you left a message for him, if he was at home you got a reply 2 days later absolutely regardless of how busy he was, he always made time for contacts. As well as the usual personal news, light hearted jokes at Aarons expense, complaints about the quality of the beers Aaron had left for him and the ongoing to and fro discussion about the Virus, in it was a date by which he would be gone for good, he'd had absolutely all he could take of the surveillance and encroaching mayhem in his area too. That date had passed a week before. There was no forwarding address or any indication of where he was going, only a terse 'goodbye'.

Aaron risked driving past Matt's house and parked nearby in the hope that he might've delayed leaving. His front door was ajar, several windows were broken, the mailbox was overflowing onto the ground and a Police car was sitting outside. Apparently his disappearance was news enough that an ongoing investigation was warranted. If his friend had simply been murdered they likely wouldn't have cared. As he watched, two Officers left the house with papers and loaded them into the boot of their Car. One was a grey haired veteran who showed a complete lack of interest in the case they were investigating; the other was an over-enthusiastic young officer who was making a show of writing up volumes of paperwork. So Matt really was gone, beyond their reach. That would be annoying the authorities no end. Aaron should've been happy for Matt, but there was only sadness at the loss of his family, the loss of another lifelong friend and absolutely trusted confidante. All he could do was hope that wherever he was, he was happy.

As he watched, a group of Gang members driving through the street spotted the Police Car, stopped and backed up to it. Four people got out, and while three stood between the Officers and their friend, the fourth openly urinated onto the side of the Police cruiser. The stunned Officers gaped in disbelief, then

grey hair flashed black with rage and pulled his pistol while his younger counterpart fearfully stepped back. The Gang members just laughed then very slowly and deliberately got back into their Car and left, knowing full well that the Officers couldn't do anything if they weren't directly threatened. Grey hair was visibly shaking with rage and looked only a fraction of a millimeter from actually firing. Go on, do it, Aaron thought. The hoped-for shots never came, and they drove away laughing and hooting at the officers.

Aaron returned to their former home and began organizing the things the rest of the family had requested from the house, then deciding which purchases to do first and withdrawing enough cash to avoid using the credit card and leaving an electronic trail. He noticed Barbara's friends moving out of the master bedroom and promptly stopped them, insisting he'd be fine on the couch. He absolutely, always put families ahead of himself, especially now.

That night he had a recurring dream that'd come to him several times in the last few years. In it, there was a small town set in a forest with a timber mill nearby. Everyone knew everyone and got along fabulously, they were less neighbors than close friends. Then the mill closed down and the town slowly emptied as people scattered to the winds. He soon tired of living elsewhere and returned to the empty town where the good memories were, but it wasn't there any more. All that remained were a few foundation stones visible at the side of a new multi-lane motorway. He stood there sadly at the site of the place he loved, then turned and left for the last time. That town and all the friendly faces were gone, never to return. So too was the town they'd previously called home. Only there wouldn't even be a modern motorway there in a few years, there'd only be half-destroyed ruins.

Such an unfamiliar feeling, not waking next to Barbara. He was too used to waking with her warm body pressing against his, her foot rubbing his leg, or better yet her long hair and hints of her unique odor tickling his nose.

He heard the floorboards in the corridor creak, a door open, then a dull thump as Barbara's friends were woken by their daughter jumping onto the bed and climbing over them as they slept. Their only complaint was not sleeping in another 10 minutes, and he heard shrieks of laughter as they both tickled her to pay her back for waking them early.

Billy and Cassy were long past the stage of waking them by jumping onto their bed and most definitely past the age of tickling. Cassy only allowed herself to be tickled on special occasions now. He missed those stages in their lives; they'd passed almost too quickly. The house had been too quiet for too long, he longed for the pitter patter of little feet and the constant surprises and challenges children bring. His friends had commented on how quickly and easily he'd slipped into the Fatherhood role, he'd learned before Barbara the meanings for the sounds and facial expressions babies made, and together they'd eased them into a pattern of organizing themselves around the adults around them. Interpretation, anticipation and preparation were the keys to babies, he remembered. When Cassy arrived 18 months later, they quickly noticed how true it was that when you've got 2 kids around the same age, they entertain each other to some extent. One of his proudest memories was of his first turn to go shopping with both kids when Barbara was away with friends, with Cassy snuggled up asleep in a carrying pouch at his side while Billy helped organize and stack the shopping in the trolley, winning Aaron admiring smiles and comments from others in the aisles. Keep them busy and amused, and then they didn't make shopping difficult, he thought. Cassy loved that pouch as a baby; she liked the feeling of the movement and always dozed peacefully in it.

The train of thought was broken when the phone in the Kitchen rang. He waited a few seconds to compose himself then answered it.

"Hello?"

"Aaron Winters?", said a male voice he didn't recognize.

"Yes, that's me."

"Channel 23, 8.30pm, Thursday night, in 2 weeks time. That's the best possible opportunity. Tell your neighbors to leave, do what has to be done, and then get out of there. Do you have that?", the voice said without any preliminaries.

"Yes. Who is this?", Aaron replied.

"That's not important. Don't look up that program on your home computer. We'll be in contact afterward", the voice said.

He'd been about to ask "How?", but the person had already hung up. The caller ID matched the no-message calls on the answer phone. That must be the call Matthew had warned him about, he thought.

Aaron promptly checked the calendar, and was dismayed to see that date was only 15 days away. With that schedule he'd be pushing his limits. It immediately occurred to him that the on line program guides didn't list anything that far ahead. Thoroughly intrigued now, he waited a few days until it'd appear in the listings and visited the local Internet cafe once more. He was annoyed to find for the first time a waiting list to use their machines and had to book an hour ahead for when there was an opening.

"Live Documentary: The first look into the top-secret US data control center", was the corresponding item on the TV station schedule. He brought up the full details of the program and searched the news sites for more information, but little was forthcoming. He wondered what was so special about the Documentary that the Virus had to be released then, he'd been intending to let it go at 2am as he left so the security people would hopefully be slowest to detect and block it before it did its damage, but it was as good a time as any. He wasn't leaving Barbara and the kids out there alone one minute longer than necessary. He was about to check his email, browse an on line bookseller and start doing some research from the same terminal, then stopped, thinking hard. He had an odd feeling that it would've been a really bad idea, ended the session instead and quietly left. Tomorrow was another day, and he'd make sure to choose a different terminal when he compiled more on line information including the planting times and propagation of several more vegetables which Barbara had requested.

At a nearby bookshop he ordered the titles and music CDs the rest of the family had requested; Billy and Cassy were after some novels and magazines, Barbara wanted the same plus a few womens magazines, and for himself he wanted a couple of novels and a book on advanced survival techniques and hunting lore.

Back home, Aaron went house to house and called a meeting of their neighbors for that evening.

"As you all know, Barbara and my kids are now in a safe place well away from here, and a few of you have similarly done the same with your families. Recent events made it clear they weren't safe here any more. It's only a matter of

time, just a month or two at most before this area is absolutely uninhabitable. Housing only a block away is already under gunfire. I'm leaving for good on Thursday in two weeks time, so there'll a party here on Wednesday night, everyone's welcome to join me. I don't have to tell you that once the Gangs realize there are empty houses in the block they'll be here like Locusts, so I really would advise everyone to strongly consider leaving then too."

Downcast looks greeted that statement. It had to happen sooner or later, but it didn't make it any easier when it finally did, people only reluctantly left behind their former lives. The area had been slowly emptying for months as people moved family members and possessions out.

He spent the remaining time ferrying a few personal belongings and tons of accumulated supplies to the storage containers half a kilometer inside the forest, spending just about the very last of their savings while he was about it. That didn't matter any more; one final mouse click at the appointed time and there would be no going back, not that it'd have been any different even if he wasn't about to unleash chaos, but at least this way he'd leave with a better conscience and a measure of revenge for the slow destruction of the country. What he did now decided his family's future survival. Books and a few precious papers were among them, the remaining survival and gardening guides they hadn't had the room to take in their backpacks, literary classics for the Children to read, the little personal things the rest of the family had requested, mementoes from happy times and clothing. Boots were high in the purchase list, with the amount of work and walking he'd done lately his were showing signs of giving up, and the rest of the family's would soon be doing the same.

Before, he'd hated driving the hundreds of miles to the National park, now it hardly fazed him to travel that distance every day. Hard work, self reliance and constantly forcing oneself onward changes a person inside, you develop a certain mental toughness, a 'just do it' attitude, he mused. After the last eight months, nothing would ever be difficult again, he thought. And every night he was up till late coding the Virus, filling the remaining gaps then exhaustively checking it over, running the checking software Matt had loaded onto the laptop then finally compiling it ready for use.

The third day into the job was the worst, it was almost unbearably hot and humid, even while driving with the window down and air conditioning on he sweltered. Two hours carrying loads of flour, cereals, powdered milk and fruit juice concentrate from the Car and trailer to the storage container in the forest did it for him, despite drinking liquids constantly to keep up he couldn't take it any more. He could only imagine what Barbara and the kids were facing out there. Shortly after sunset the Thunderstorms rolled in and incoming cold air forced the accumulated moisture out of the air, dumping it in a torrential downpour mixed with squalls of howling wind and sky-filling blasts of lightning which echoed between the ground and hills. Watching the display, all he could think of was his family. Half of him said they'd be watching and loving the storm; the cabin would likely take a direct hit from a tree falling on it with only damaged roofing slats, but he couldn't escape the thought of them freezing and suffering out there alone, which in turn made him think what kind of a man he was to leave his family there like that.

On his last visit to the Gun store to purchase a packet of ammunition, he made a spur of the moment decision to purchase a high powered spring loaded hunting Crossbow and several dozen bolts for when or if the day came that their ammunition ran out. The shop owner looked mildly surprised, and commented that a number of his regular customers had been buying them lately

as well as all sorts of camping and survival gear which usually had a very low turnover.

Everything was finished by Tuesday, and on Wednesday he rested. The neighbors, their friends and families had made their own arrangements, starting that evening and the next morning they would go their separate ways. Several small groups as well as Stevies had built small self-sufficient communities in various Forests, a few had elected like Aaron to go it on their own and had chosen their own places well out of the way of the blighted cities. The night's gunfire had begun only a couple of blocks away when that last meeting got underway.

They discussed their plans, swapped Books, stores and advice for the last time, shared drinks and laughed over memories of better times and shared experiences with setting up their new homes. A couple of the Men wore tough workmens boots he noted. Many had Pistols tucked into waistbands. A lot of people had developed a lot of calluses on worn hands for the first time in their lives over the last eight months. Even the former office workers looked leaner, fitter, taut, tanned and bulked out from both hard work and Gym workouts. You could see the differences in more subtle ways too, people acted and moved differently, more thoughtfully. They had more time for that which mattered and none for what didn't. Time, life and family were precious; everything else was way down the list. Hard work bred harder attitudes.

It was interesting to see who hadn't built out there, just as in school the loudest mouths that constantly had to prove themselves had quietly disappeared while the quiet ones just got on with it without complaining. More than half had chosen the harder but infinitely more rewarding option, including some of those who could still afford to move to safer areas. It was hardly necessary to point out that moving would still only mean shifting to a temporary haven and gain just a few years respite at most before they had to uproot and leave yet again. A few unfortunates had chosen to live in tents, for which Aaron felt sorry for them. None of them were among the people there that night.

Little by little as the evening wore on the numbers thinned and friends said their final goodbyes, and Cars departed the area forever. Those who left that night had their house lights on timers as a disincentive for break-ins and to give the remaining people a chance to leave quietly the next day.

Before leaving, Gareth startled Aaron by approaching him and asking if he'd like to help him with a little job he'd saved until this moment. Aaron hadn't seen Gareth since that first meeting so many months ago and assumed he'd left for safer places as many others had done, so it was a surprise when he turned up like almost forgotten ghost from the past. Gareth had gone from house to house collecting heavy bucket loads of everyones spare nails, screws, tacks and metal plates, anything which could burst a tire, and he needed a hand carrying them to the edge of the block to spread them across the road leading to the encroaching gang infested area. Nobody from their neighborhood would be leaving in that direction, so it was a small degree of well-earned payback for the grief they'd caused. Aaron promptly and gleefully agreed, and between them they carried 4 large bucket loads of metal and dumped them across the road.

It took less than a minute for the first victim to fall into their primitive trap. They heard a screech of tires as a Car traveling much too fast to stop in time juddered over the sharp obstacles. With wheels hissing air and spitting out embedded shards amid showers of sparks as the Black occupants screamed death upon whoever had done that to them, the Car trundled off into the distance. It wouldn't get far in that state. Gareth and Aaron doubled over from much-needed laughter and high-fived each other at their small victory.

The next was a completely different matter. They heard the uneven roar of a badly tuned engine approaching, then the unmistakable sound of metal clattering on metal and several pops in quick succession, and the Car stopped beside them as they laughed. The two late teenage occupants spotted the buckets in their hands, put two and two together and doors sprang open, ready to do battle. Gareth instinctively swung a metal bucket full force into a head as it emerged from the Car, closed the gap and delivered a series of punches and kicks. That fight was over. Prison had taught him to live by instincts. Aaron didn't have it so easy. His opponent had a short crowbar, raised and prepared to swing as he came around from his side of the car. Aaron froze at the incoming steel, and then a saying from an almost forgotten school friend came to him. "If you're afraid, the fight is already lost". The friend was all of 5 foot 1 inch tall and was always being picked on by groups of school bullies, brave as they were. He'd gotten mad instead of withdrawing as so many tended to do under unrelenting pressure and attacked the biggest of them one time. Aaron wasn't there to see it but heard it was an amazing sight, the bully crumpling under continuous blows and his friends instantly scattering in all directions. They had a new respect for him afterward and he rarely had problems from then on. Aaron ducked within the turning circle of the steel bar, lifted a knee to duck the kick which was already rising, then delivered a punch to the exposed kidney area. His opponent dropped the bar and charged him enraged, swinging punches furiously. Aaron blocked only some of them and they traded blows, blind unthinking rage against controlled anger. Aaron had a lot of upper body strength after so much heavy work of late and kept hammering accurately at the face and body of his opponent without relenting, regardless of the blood tricking down his own face, until his opponent slowed and tried blocking. Instantly Aaron delivered a kick to the lower stomach. He started to fall, and Aaron finished the fight with more hits to the face. Aaron didn't kick his opponent when down, even though he had no doubt that had the roles been reversed he'd have been stomped to oblivion. He had enough pride in himself not to lower himself to that despite his anger.

Aaron noticed Gareth watching intently as he wiped the blood from his nose. It wasn't broken, but the bruising would remain for a few days at least.

"You could've helped", Aaron said.

"No, it was more fun to watch, but I was there in case you needed it", he replied, showing him the pistol in his pocket.

"You asshole!"

They heard guffawing laughter from the other side of the road, and in the gloom saw an elderly bearded Black high-fiving them.

"That's something I never thought I'd see!", he said, slapped his thighs as he bent forward from laughing so hard.

They saw the funny side too, and high-five'd him in turn from across the road, joining in the merriment before walking off up the road.

Aarons last morning in the city dawned clear, cool and silent. Only the slightest breeze ruffled leaves. Many of the nearby houses were empty, the rest would be by midday. They'd heeded his warning. The gunfire had stopped around dawn as always and the perpetrators would now be asleep until well after midday. Plenty of time to make one final sweep of the house just in case he left anything vital behind.

But he made sure to leave other things for the Feds to waste their time on, including an address book containing all sorts of locations and phone numbers unrelated to them or anyone they knew, random addresses in Gang infested areas, Federal computer centers, Politicians houses, places like that. He sprinkled it with dust and spider webs and made it look like it'd been lost and forgotten years ago; fallen between the desk and wall, open at a random page with half the pages folded back. Everyone trusted what they had to uncover for themselves over what they heard directly. He similarly erased his mobile phones address book and filled it with more random phone numbers. He wondered if they'd fall for it, but then he remembered how the September 11 aircraft hijackers had left no address books, mobile phones or any kind of traces for investigators to follow, except for the pilot Mohammed Atta, who just happened to leave Arabic language flight manuals in a Car left at the Airport for the police to immediately find. Aaron had always been suspicious of information that easily had, it was just one of the little things that didn't quite add up with that disaster.

The few remaining items to go accumulated around the backpack. He selected a few last precious photos from photo albums to take, picked a few flowers from the Garden and drove out to put them his parents' graves, and with great reluctance burned all personal letters and every photo of any family member posed with friends which wasn't leaving with him. All documents, references, books related to politics, receipts, work pay chits, bank statements, tax records, everything went into the fire, going right back to his days at school and University. He wasn't leaving anything for Federal agents to start with or the controlled media to splash onto the news, they were going to have to find any information on him the hard way. He went through the attic storage space and garage looking for papers, dumping entire boxes into the blaze, occasionally turning the ashes to ensure complete combustion of the mountains of paper. The smoke pall was small in comparison to the lingering fires still burning from last night's mayhem nearby.

Several boxes were missing from the attic space, he noticed. One had Barbara's neatly folded maternity dresses, the reusable nappies, baby toys and hangers. She must've given it to the family living in Stevie's former home; the two women were about the same height and build. She'd be having their third child in a couple of months in their new home among Stevie's group. That was Barbara; always ready to help out genuinely needy people with anything they had.

Hours later when the pile of ashes in the back yard had cooled sufficiently, he ripped to shreds the short letter she'd given him to leave behind and dropped it onto the blackened embers of their former life. It was a pre-dated letter stating that she couldn't handle his continual unexplained absences and leaving them there alone, announcing her intention to leave him and the area with the kids for their own protection, and telling him not to look for them until he'd come to his senses and cared more about them. That not only cleared her of implication in what was about to happen, it created a possible grievance and personal motive as well as throwing a curve ball prompting the Feds to search to the ends of the earth for the missing parts of his life. It would complicate things indeed, he thought. He smiled and silently gave thanks to Barbara.

Apart from a few sentimental items, most everything else could remain here, they belonged to a life that could never happen again. Not here, nor anywhere else under present and at least short-term foreseeable conditions. He was tempted to throw a match onto the Carpet as he left, but he didn't see any point. He just wished he could fill the place from floor to ceiling with explosives to greet the Feds who'd be swarming over the place before long.

But he made sure to leave by the computer an old school photo of him proudly holding up an American flag, from the days when it meant something. The honor of a flag was that of the country which bore it, and for what it was worth now it may as well have been replaced with the Stalin-era Communist red flag, the USA was now a feared, repressive, freedom destroying, invading and occupying Tyranny in all but name.

Much had been made of the Echelon system in the media and the former conspiracy sites. It was indeed a global monitoring system as people suspected, it comprised a myriad of different data collection technologies linked through a series of pre-processors and sorting and sifting programs, weeding the music from the chaff, using military derived technologies that would boggle the average person. The makers had a seemingly insatiable appetite for data, and sources were constantly being added as they came available with the ever increasing interception technologies. Everyone from cryptographers to chaos theorists, mathematicians and computer scientists were involved in its ever continued development. Billions of dollars had been spent by intelligence agencies just on Internet surveillance and detection alone.

Fort Meade was the most well-known of the data interception and processing centers, its location and purpose had been deliberately leaked for people to waste their time investigating, and be investigated themselves as they watched the comings and goings at the location or after they found the crumbs the intelligence people left for them to find on websites.

There were many other similar outposts around the globe in every industrialized country, a few by necessity employed domed antennas for exclusive use by the military and intelligence networks and were isolated in the middle of nowhere in treeless high security zones, but most were unknown even to those living around them. They were hidden hundreds of feet under vacant lots, under industrial areas and even under tracts of forest. The planners preferred underground facilities despite the enormous expense, that way there was absolutely only one way in or out and no possibility of leaks or remote monitoring. Their fronts were disguised as insurance buildings, private underground car parks, media centers and industrial storage facilities. They appeared completely innocuous, some weren't even fenced off, but they were in fact the most intensely surveilled real estate on earth.

Optical computers were the forte of Echelon and had been for decades, they could handle hundreds of simultaneous tasks through the same optical gates and transistors to achieve virtually unlimited computing power. The civilian sector had barely begun to discover those, and the military wasn't helping them. Some things weren't worth sharing.

All phone conversations were recorded and had been for years, and were stored in raw form in gigantic memories for a few days at a time in case an official wanted to hear something for themselves instead of reading the text version. Specialized hardware analyzed voice calls and reduced them in real time to text readable by computers; it penetrated the thickest accents and could handle any language. That part had only grudgingly been released in a limited form on phones for the limited hearing and those who wanted super-cheap mobile

or international phone calls, or for on-the-spot translation. The incoming text was converted back to voice, and the owner could even select a male or female voice to recite the incoming words. All you needed was to buy a chipset for your base language and select the destination language. The chipsets were very cheap too, and it went without saying that other monitoring, analysis and backdoor hardware were built into them as well. The two technologies had instantly made the World a truly international meeting place, and also infinitely more accessible for Echelon, it had freed up a lot of processor time for other work.

Another set of programs analyzed the content of voice calls for 'deceptive tones' and content, determining when people weren't telling the full story or only incomplete parts in person and alerting Netsafe accordingly. A huge effort had gone into this part; it had required a fair degree of artificial intelligence on the part of the software. More AI had gone into the pre-sorting programs which worked with current and previous conversations, transaction records and tracking data to watch for unusual trends and occurrences so that only the ones deemed 'threatening' were displayed for human operators to interpret further.

In addition to all that, automatic search programs scanned the entire internet every few hours for more subtle or out of place content which otherwise escaped Echelons Keyword dragnet, such as web pages, discussion areas and news items which touched on criticism of Government policy or cast a bad light on social trends. Depending on the circumstances the tagged items were either ignored, deleted or the writer monitored. Occasionally a different tact was chosen; the offending article was completely left alone, but its checksum was added into NetSafe scans. If that article was subsequently located anywhere except the internet cache directory in a computer, the reader was instantly flagged and monitored.

A team of female Hackers had once created spectacularly successful specialized search software which hunted down illegal Pornography, which Law Enforcement had improved on since then. That was absolutely nothing compared to the AI based scans the Echelon system had been doing for a long time before Law Enforcement had even gotten that idea into their heads, they'd long known about those websites and a lot more besides, but once again that information would not be shared so questions couldn't be asked about the source. Similarly, with a bit of retuning the system could have been used to solve any amount of personal crime by catching people organizing drug deals and boasting of criminal exploits. That wasn't, and never would be, the focus of Echelon. Its only purpose was maintaining Global and National Security.

Much of their job was automated, pre-sorting computer software chewed through tens of Gigabytes per second of incoming data, mostly generated by NetSafe being triggered by word combinations in emails. Some instances were forwarded to more sophisticated programs for closer analysis, and depending on the result the individuals computer was either told to ignore the instance, to send more complete keystroke logs going further back in time, set to a higher alert status with more trigger word combinations, or even to activate full monitoring. Other options included having a controller interrogate the suspect computer by remote, or to immediately notify the suspects local Police. The rest of the incoming data resulted from complete logging of suspect individuals.

There were many discreet levels of surveillance available, ranging from merely watching one computer or individual, to watching that persons entire contact list, or in the very highest priority cases instantly alerting an operator to watch in-person whenever they picked up their phone or used a

computer. Everything was handled automatically from data collection to analysis, human operators only came into it when intervention was necessary or specific information had to be instantly available. NetSafe itself was only an extension of surveillance windows left in Operating Systems for the Military and Law Enforcement to use. Instead of having to hack through Firewall defenses one computer at a time, NetSafe instantly opened all of them to official scrutiny for any reason, right down to statistical analysis.

Richard Caffries was just one of the technicians at one of the NetSafe data sorting centers. He was a PhD in statistics and a computer and mathematics whiz like many of his co-workers. Richards specialty was monitoring trends and watching for things others tended to overlook in the overall picture; he loved his job and often spent hours investigating anomalies which'd cropped up during his work. A regular part of Richards was a survey of general usage, among other things someone wanted to know which percentage of conversations took place via email and by voice, and which percentage of both was business or personal. That was a monthly job dictated by the powers that be. All sorts of traffic analysis software had of course been developed for Homeland security use and more was constantly being added. They'd long since learned the usage patterns which resulted from various events in peoples lives, you could predict down to the thousands who'd be at home, work or enroute somewhere.

There'd been discussions among the conspiracy people about the possible use of implants and biochips, the fact was that in these days of largely cashless electronic transactions, mobile phones, email, call logs and backdoors in both hardware and software, you only had to flip a software switch to watch someone to the extent they'd be driven nuts if they knew about it. Every press of the keyboard at work or home, every spoken word on the phone, every transaction was instantly available for perusal if they desired. Password security was completely nonexistent when every terminal and PC automatically recorded them; they were secret between you, your ISP, and the Government. And on top of all that there was the long available capability of mobile phones to discreetly transmit continuously on demand, recording all conversations around them. Mobile phones had always been Echelons best friend; by their very nature their owners might as well have been carrying personal GPS units broadcasting their exact whereabouts at all times. Everyone knew about that from crime cases that'd been solved using phone company logs, what very few knew was that the systems not only alarmed if specific mobiles came close enough together to indicate contact between known suspects, they also gave notice if enough congregated in a small area for unknown cause. The cheaper and more advanced they were, the more useful they were to Echelon, it meant people conducted more and more business on them and made it easier to build personal profiles and pinpoint suspicious activities. It was a simple affair to follow people even when they were on Holidays through credit card and ATM use, mobile phone locations as well as compulsory ID checks at state lines and at many destinations.

Drastic changes were easy to spot; if people died or disappeared, their NetSafe software suddenly went to total idle status or was switched off forever, or else the computer ownership changed, accompanied of course by a sudden flurry of phone calls and messages between immediate friends and family. The ones who'd simply opted out of society for one reason or another typically made a stream of outgoing phone calls and messages first before dropping from sight. Small numbers of people had always been disappearing, and during the last decade the numbers had steadily increased. The probable causes ranged from crime to people changing lifestyle and persona to quitting society completely, and few concerns were raised.

But abruptly in the last few weeks a new trend had appeared, noticed only by him and a few others. Large numbers of people were dropping from sight, accompanied by no flurry of incoming or outgoing calls, but in some cases they received one or more calls from a payphone before dropping off the radar. By itself it meant nothing, it could be any number of reasons starting with a family crisis, but there'd been tens of thousands of households just in the last few days, and the rate was increasing. The numbers were just enough to be detected on the usage and population figures but were still much too small to attract official attention. True, every weekend there were far larger population movements. His first impression was that it was people leaving for a large rock concert or ball game somewhere and were invisible to the networks while they were on route, but entire households? That didn't fit. And travelers didn't generally turn off their mobile phones, either. Either something had happened to them, or else they were making a conscious effort to stay off the Networks. As the numbers grew dramatically over the past few days, they'd finally piqued his curiosity enough to make him look further.

Then it was reported that entire blocks adjacent to Gang infested areas were suddenly emptying all over the country. That made people take notice. That had happened many times during and prior to Gangs occupying areas, but those events were invariably accompanied by emergency phone calls, and those who survived reappeared elsewhere. This was different, people were making a few calls in quick succession then they and everyone around them were vanishing, with no prior indication of trouble.

The more he looked into the backgrounds of the newly vanished, the more concerned he'd become. A random check indicated that many had spent up large in the previous few months, some to the point of completely emptying their bank accounts and even maxing out their credit cards doing the same. Many had impeccable credit records before suddenly apparently going berserk with their spending. What on earth makes people do that, he pondered. The Total Awareness Network software matched credit card numbers with items, location, and time to give total purchase details, all instantly accessible by multiple agencies. Others had similarly made big cash withdrawals over time, presumably so their purchases wouldn't be recorded. The available purchase figures showed an abrupt shift from everyday items to long term supplies and hardware.

That bothered him enough that he'd finally approached his superiors with his concerns. They listened patiently enough, but with a distinct lack of interest. Yes, they knew about it and had discussed it at length amongst themselves; they commended him on his initiative but told him not to worry. They reminded him that the entire system was geared toward identifying communicating command structures, and none was evident here. There was not the slightest sign of unusual 'chatter' anywhere, and no warnings had been received from anyone in the field. The numbers were much too low to be of concern yet they asserted, they were still talking about far less than one percent of the population. Many times they'd noticed how under the right circumstances numbers of unconnected people suddenly acted the same way, it looked like another example of that and was far more likely to be another random population surge, statistical anomaly or possible hysteria in response to frightening news items rather than anything serious. Regardless of their reassurances he still left the meeting with a feeling of unease; sometimes he felt his superiors seemed so fixated on the demographics, the big picture and individual monitoring that they tended to overlook everything in between. He felt this was one of those occasions.

So he'd continued his investigation on his own, and kept on finding snippets of information that unsettled him. The patronage at internet cafes had increased enormously in the last few weeks, for instance. That happened every

weekend and whenever people traveled. Or when they wanted anonymity, he reminded himself.

Another minor but strange thing he'd noticed was, why were some of these newly vanished people leaving their computers permanently switched on and online in their suddenly derelict houses? Out of curiosity he requested and got the result of scans of several of these computers, none showed untoward processes queued or unknown software loaded. It didn't make sense. Everyone knew NetSafe reported idle status along with everything else, didn't these people care that they'd be more quickly officially reported missing and have their bank accounts automatically frozen?

He'd also overheard part of a lunchtime discussion among the radio traffic analysis people; they were perplexed by odd transmissions which had appeared in the last few weeks. Rarely used frequencies were suddenly being used to send numerous bursts of computer data and messages of a few seconds duration, with no acknowledgements being sent in return. Again, no specifics were mentioned in the messages that'd been intercepted. The automatic scanners took a few seconds to lock onto conversations if they weren't watching the channel at the time. The intercepted spoken words contained references to numbers, trees, rocks and other images instead, and the broadcast locations invariably triangulated to moving vehicles. There was no tracking those unless they kept broadcasting. Then abruptly that morning the unusual traffic had ceased.

Email, instant messaging programs and mobile phone text messaging were the most difficult to monitor, by nature the notes swapped on those tended to be short, anyone could simply send a note like "Meet me at 3" containing no keywords for software to detect. The real Terrorists were fully aware that highly encrypted codes attracted attention so discreet face to face meetings were arranged the same way. Law Enforcement could hardly demand that users be precise and fully descriptive in messages, the most that could be done was to once again interpret the level of completeness, monitor trends and watch who was talking to who, but in the absence of verbal cues that was notoriously difficult when more often than not it meant anything from a busy lifestyle to an extramarital affair. But there too, anomalies had appeared and been commented on. Both the amount of traffic and degree of caution detected in messages had noticeably increased.

Richard had spotted that himself. One of the obscure softwares he'd been involved in creating had at the same time provided another piece in the puzzle. It was designed to watch for recontacts; people suddenly chatting with others they hadn't spoken with in years. It was meant to help pinpoint terrorist cells and sleeper agents, but no matter how much they'd tried to filter innocent people, normal usage among the general population overwhelmed any possible data of interest. So along with other softwares it'd been quietly shelved. Only Richard still used it on occasion for his job, it generated useful statistics as well as any of the other tools he had at his disposal. Now, for the first time ever, it was displaying a glaring anomaly. It indicated that people everywhere were suddenly talking to others they hadn't contacted for years. The figures he was seeing were dozens of times higher than the random background. Where on earth did this come from, he wondered. Small groups suddenly talking they could interpret, but when everyone started talking to everyone... And once again, everything had returned to normal that morning.

Most disturbingly, the voice logs of the public phone calls were of warnings to get out their area, fast. Public phones everywhere were monitored closely and had been for years, and all those calls indicated extremely high voice stress and truth ratings. He'd looked up the recordings of a few of those

calls before they were automatically deleted after 3 days. They were short and to the point, the recipients didn't seem to know who they were talking to, but the message was always the same. Leave now. None contained any specifics either, and if there'd been a direct Gang threat elsewhere they'd have known about it.

Anyone else might simply ascribe it to concerned family members, but to Richard it smelled of something different. To him the changes looked too abrupt, large-scale and organized. As he watched the reports of one area after another emptying of most or all its occupants, an uncomfortable thought came to him which'd been nagging him for days; as unlikely as it seemed, if orders were coming from people who weren't using the phone or internet networks at all, that would avoid the subtle traps that'd been laid, and more worryingly it also implied they knew how the system worked. The automatic detection programs had also spotted the changes and briefly raised the alert status, if he'd the authority he'd have kept it that way, he had the uneasy feeling something important was being overlooked. He could have sworn he was wrong, but it was almost like areas were evacuating in preparation for an imminent War.

As the time drew near for the Documentary his anticipation and dread grew in equal measure. Days before he'd compiled the Virus for the last time, with no errors reported. That was no absolute guarantee of success, but it had to do. Despite all that, he couldn't help perusing the coding yet again looking for any slip-ups. None presented themselves. Finally he copied the Virus to a CD then unscrewed and removed the cover of the lounge computer in preparation for his departure. He also made sure to clean the replacement Hard Drive with strong solvents to remove Matts fingerprints and DNA; he was fully aware that in a case this major the Police would cover every conceivable angle and leave absolutely no stone unturned. The faithful solar Laptop was the very last item which went into the backpack. As well as being a hive of evidence linking Matthew to him, it also had a built-in radio and TV card, which together with audio noise reduction software should enable him to keep in touch with events all over the country on the radio scanner.

For the last time Aaron sat on the Balcony of their former home, watching the sun going down and shadows growing. At this stage in his life, married, with kids, a house and a good job there should have been every reason to celebrate. Years past this had once been a happy neighborhood, people had worked their guts out to own a slice of this place, and now it was abandoned and all but worthless. There had to be a lot of bankers losing a lot of money all over America when people simply walked away from everything, but there never seemed to be any complaint. Bankers don't accept any loss lightly, they had to be as aware as anyone about the changing risks and problems, that was why he suspected the costs were underwritten by the government and simply added to the National debt.

How in the hell had things gone so bad for a country which had so much potential, it was the perennial question he had asked himself and others many times in the last few years. Spineless leadership, no population control, mismanaged and utterly wasted finances, unnecessary wars, a destroyed and meaningless education system, destroyed youth, and a terrorized population without hope for the future were the legacy of one weak and trivial presidency after another. With better leadership the US should have been swimming in wealth with only a fraction of the current level of taxes and still be able to take its pick and choice of who was allowed into the country. It was the absolute, iron-clad will of any country to choose whom it allowed in, not some international organization supposedly representing the best interests of everyone but actually helping nobody.

He shook his head in disbelief and disgust. No leadership loyal to the US in any way, shape or form would cause or allow the changes which were destroying the World; they were completely against everything America had once stood for. It was as if the leadership was under the control of a foreign power with an agenda of control over the population and deliberate destruction of the standards of living. Everything they and their Ancestors had fought for was for a future which was vanishing; the lights were going out all over the World. No more. It was time.

"We're online now from a location we're forbidden to reveal or even to know ourselves. We were driven here in blacked-out vans and taken to an unmarked discreet building in a metropolitan area, then taken 20 storeys down to this control centre in an armored cargo lift. The building itself is constructed of multi-layered hardened Steel, and would probably withstand anything short of a nuclear device."

"The entire network has been taken to a slightly elevated alert status during this program, and all pathways are under increased surveillance. This facility has the absolute highest priority in the event of a major power failure, with our computer controlled overrides and secondary power lines we would still have full power no matter what."

Computer controlled? That was very good news... Instantly it hit him; the time and details in the phone call had to have been provided by an insider. So there was at least one person, maybe more, among the Hyenas with the sense to stand up. Maybe his hopes were correct, there was a Resistance movement.

President Bush himself was onscreen now, surrounded by hundreds of workers concentrating on banks of flickering monitors.

"The contents of this room are just a small part of just one of the security measures being taken to safeguard this great nation of ours", he began, "Our Airports, communications, cities, power systems and all other infrastructure are steadily being made safe from those who hate and despise our Freedom. We are changing the world to make it a safe and Democratic place for all, and to that end we will tolerate no power except our own."

Oh, really? Aaron thought. Not a single word about safety inside the cities or effective border controls? Nobody 'despises our Freedom', and for that matter the rest of the World don't give a damn how we choose to live. Why should they? They hate you, Mr. Bush, for your unflinching support of their enemies and using pretexts to declare sanctions then invade and destroy their infrastructure and deprive them of theirs, and they despise you, Mr. Bush, for giving the reconstruction contracts and ownership of state assets to their enemies, for allowing foreign intelligence organizations to operate on their soil and calling the resulting resistance "Terrorism". And Damn you, for using the excuse of "Security" to bring the World closer to a Police State than Hitler or Stalin ever did, and for making the Orwellian slogan "Freedom is Slavery" true in every sense of the word. The lies, the falsely promoted 'wars' which didn't protect America, the intentional destruction of national identities everywhere, the gradual imposition of martial law, the promotion of criminal lifestyles ahead of productive ones, it all ends here. The fight back starts right here.

"In this control room, WE control and monitor the safety of the internet and all Data networks", Mr. Bush proudly stated. "No virus, No hacking attempt, No attempt to interfere with data transfer slips past us. We can directly and

instantly visualize the status of every network, and bring into complete focus the activity of any single suspect computer, anywhere. There is no way above, below or around the system. For the first time, the Electronic Networks are safe for everyone to use the world over", he proudly stated as he slowly strode along the impressive aisle of computer operators at their active status and control panels.

"LIAR!", Aaron shouted at the TV screen. You and your predecessors caused and allowed the situation to develop so that you could push the World into Slavery and One World government, controlled by you and whoever is promoting you.

Aaron couldn't take any more. In a rage he loaded the CD into the lounge computer. As soon as the file appeared in Windows Explorer he double clicked on it. The hard drive light flickered briefly, and then the outgoing data indicator came on and stayed on. No errors popped up, the coding and file targeting were good. Several minutes later it was done. The data output slowed as the virus switched to port scanning random ranges of IP numbers and hopefully infecting the active and susceptible machines it detected.

Now all he could do was wait. Succeed or fail.

"... The aims of Terrorists and Dictators alike are one and the same. Through this center and all the other technical resources of this nation, we are committed to monitoring and eradicating their power bases, stopping their finances and unmasking them from their anonymity. Let the word go out this night that we are hereby serving notice that a new age of prosperity, independence, democracy, freedom of choice, freedom from terror, freedom from the dreaded knock on the door in the middle of the night and freedom from slavery is dawning across the Globe. We will not stop until we have accomplished our solemn duty to bring freedom and hope to oppressed peoples everywhere. The age of the mindless Dictator ruling by fear and force alone is slowly but steadily coming to an end, we are using every economic and political means to rein in their power over subjugated peoples. There are ongoing minor security problems in newly freed countries, but they are being overcome with resolution and determined steady effort, we will see the process we have begun through to completion for the benefit of all. We are building the global, united democratic diplomatic structure to lead free peoples into the next century and beyond..."

Aaron felt like throwing up. That mans orders had caused untold starvation, misery and death on a global scale, secret camps were springing up everywhere to process and interrogate the never ending stream of political prisoners and opponents and execute the 'disappeared' from the US and occupied countries alike, and he was talking about Freedom?

He glanced over at the computer. The outgoing data indicator had turned solid again; a stream of data was spewing outward across the Networks. Port scans, password attempts or infecting other computers; he would never know. That part was working at least, so far everything was going according to plan. The minutes dragged by infinitely slowly. Come on, come on, there were a lot of peoples hopes built into it, Please don't let all that work just disappear into the ether, he hoped. By now the number of infected computers should be into the thousands, there should be directing computers coming online and coordinating the attack, sending building tidal waves of wildly replicating viral data cascading through the networks. He was wondering at what point it would get attention, when it put noticeable stress onto the servers or when it started hammering at something vital.

"What can people look forward to in the future?", President Bush casually asked the technical head of staff.

"Well, the next version of NetSafe will include Distributed Computing facilities to help crack encryption and assist in Network traffic analysis, it'll have more intelligent threat detection, plus we'll just about be able to carry about a full forensic examination of any online PC, and some other things we won't talk about here."

"...There is an increase in idle status, more than likely because people are watching this program."

The President smiled thinly. He never laughed, Aaron thought. In fact he never showed much emotion at all. He came across as little more than the Human equivalent of a Parrot, never deviating an iota from what he was told to say and never thinking for himself. That man was perfectly suited for the role of destroying Freedom by proxy, he mused.

In the background, the tiniest look of concern crossed the head operators face. He touched one side of his headphones, paying attention to something he was hearing.

"Yes, I see it", he said to whoever he was connected to. "Internet gateways are reporting unusual traffic patterns", he commented, "Idle status is still increasing, and data loads are starting to climb inexplicably. That's odd...", his voice trailed away.

Onscreen, a status panel turned red, followed seconds later by several others.

"Large scale port scans detected!", came a loud voice.

"Hello, this could be interesting, Mr. President, we get very few of these nowadays", he remarked, "Usually it just turns out to be faulty or old software", he added.

His smile dropped when he brought up a data volume analysis graph. It was rising rapidly.

"Data traffic everywhere has commenced exponential growth, doubling every fifteen seconds!", the same loud voice announced.

"Can I ask what's happening?", Mr. Bush asked, feeling suddenly left out of the loop.

"Is this a local network simulation?" a technician asked.

"No, it's not."

"Sir, traffic analysis indicates a possible virus attack. It looks like a really bad one."

"Where did that come from? It just appeared everywhere at once!" someone shouted.

"This is a live situation, stop the Broadcast and get the media people out of here!" someone demanded.

"No, leave it going, let the viewers see what happens when someone does something this stupid!", the head controller replied, glaring at the Camera and seemingly at Aaron, "This must've been pre-loaded onto PC's and timed for activation during this program."

Wrong! Aaron laughed at that.

"Isolate one infected computer and analyze. Start the trace programs, obtain its profile, Filter, contain and pin its origin down."

"We should have this under control in a minute or so, my staff can handle anything", he assured Mr. Bush.

"We're working through date stamps and backtracking, we'll have its origin shortly", came another voice.

"The Virus has been isolated!", the first voice announced, "We have a profile and are reverse compiling, Detection and analysis software are looking through log files...", his voice trailed away and a confused look appeared on his face, "The Networks are showing signs of instability, traffic is slowing and being rerouted, we are receiving error calls and significant packet losses. We are working on the cause."

A stream of coding appeared on a nearby screen and was eagerly pounced upon by a group of programmers.

"Let's have a look at this thing... It's a big one, whatever it is", one was heard to comment.

"What's that?", one asked, pointing at a section of onscreen code.

"It's attacking something, I don't know what just yet", came the reply.

Almost simultaneously their expressions changed as they continued down the code listing.

"This looks almost like one of ours!", someone commented without thinking.

"Oh, no...", another groaned as his eyes went wide.

"The source has been located, the originating IP address is now under remote interrogation!", interrupted a loud voice.

Aaron instantly peered over to his computer. Incoming data blocks were indeed pinging it, but Error messages were cascading down the screen in response. Good so far.

Hundreds of operators simultaneously jumped onscreen as every software alarm they had activated. Sirens wailed, hundreds of voices were raised in surprise.

"Calm down people, we're trained for this, do your duty", the head operators voice came over the room, trying to restore order.

It'd found them, Aaron thought. He'd wondered how long that would take. The battle had been joined.

"Oh my God!" someone shouted as Billions of password control attempts simultaneously blazed into their networks in a few seconds.

Just as silently as it began, the attack stopped. All the alarms abated, except one.

"What's that?"

"Connectivity figures are dropping sharply, Networks and company systems are collapsing, they're going down all over the place... Data rates are still climbing, doubling constantly! All data lines everywhere are approaching capacity."

A technician ran up to the head operator. "Sir, Traffic analysis reports the Virus is acting more and more like a Peer to Peer network, it looks like it's communicating with itself."

All he could utter was a dumbfounded "What?", either unable or unwilling to consider the implications.

Another technician had worse news. "Sir, we have completed analysis of the Virus, it's spreading at the theoretical limit of what's possible, its content is as bad as it can possibly get, we need to consider..."

"I don't need to hear that, remember your training and deal with it!", he cut him off.

"What's happening?", demanded Mr. Bush.

The lights in the control room flickered.

Mr. Bush's tour guide glanced suspiciously upward before replying; "We came under a vast coordinated attack of some sort, the Firewalls and security systems blocked it, then it seemed to stop of its own accord."

"Interrogating the originating computer and affected computers... no response" came a loud voice.

Disciplined as he was, for the first time the head operators face showed genuine concern.

"Disconnect them, all of them", was his immediate reply.

"We already tried that, they're responding normally to pings and check commands, they won't respond to system commands."

The colour instantly faded from his face.

"Why did it stop?", asked Mr. Bush.

There came a long pause, another upward glance before the head technician replied.

"I think it went elsewhere looking for easier targets."

The power died in the control room, then everywhere else.

Aaron chuckled to himself in the sudden darkness and gave silent thanks to Matthew, wherever he was. He wondered if emergency battery power alone would supply that huge armored cargo lift. He doubted it. Breathe your own damned recycled Hubris, he thought.

From a couple of blocks away there came hooting, cheering and a sudden burst of gunfire. He knew what the Human Predators were thinking; tonight was going to be FUN! Not for long, he thought.

He flicked on a torch, pulled the Hard Drive from the suddenly silent computer, swapped in the replacement given him by Matthew then replaced the metal cover and screws. There, waste your time on that.

The front door was left unlocked as he drove through the darkened streets, slowing to casually throw his Mobile phone from the window toward a group of figures waiting near a lifeless ATM machine in the vain hope a victim would stop to withdraw cash. Then he thought again, stopped his Car and emptied an entire pistol magazine into the milling figures. Two went down, the rest ran. That's a start, he thought.

He slowed a second time to throw the Hard Drive and CD from a bridge into deep water, and then drove into the country to meet his waiting Family. He drove his faithful Car well off the road ten miles from the start point of the walk into the Forest, left it facing into the countryside pointed away from his intended route with all 4 doors open as though it had been hurriedly abandoned. He took his time sprinkling pepper around the area to stop Police tracker dogs following him, left a false trail with broad heavy footprints leading away from his true course, then backtracked and walked through moonlight for half the night along the isolated National Park road. He had to be as far as possible from the Car before it was found, if it was found. He was surprised and concerned to see lights glowing within several of the formerly abandoned chalets near the road, he felt they were likely to be refugees from the stricken cities, but naturally he wasn't taking chances and stayed right away from them and was constantly on the lookout for movement as he walked. At around 2am he set up the tent and bedded down for the remainder of the night.

The next morning it was eerily silent in the Forest. He'd brought a handheld scanner to listen to the Police channels and take note of the progress of the search, but they and every other band were silent. Only the crackling hiss of the Universe was to be heard. A few CB radio operators were talking faintly in the distance, and that was all. He turned it off.

Breakfast was a mixture of Fruit, Nuts and Cereal, then he packed up and left, leaving no rubbish behind. It took till midday before he reached the chosen Forest turnoff and left the road behind. GPS was still working as he'd expected, it operated on an isolated military network and wasn't prone to outside interference. He briefly stopped at the storage containers and offloaded some of the backpack contents into them, replaced the silica gel desiccant packs to keep the contents dry then sealed and covered them with loose soil once more. There was no sign they'd been visited by the rest of the family yet, which was promising.

Using familiar landmarks with maps and GPS as backup as always to double check his location he resumed the outward walk through the Forest and along ridges and creek beds. It was a silent, contemplative walk through the best countryside the State had to offer. It gave him time to think, something he hadn't had much of lately.

What happened next was largely guesswork. As ignorant as the authorities were of the realities of life, they had to have some inkling of the disaster about to befall them, they'd be making frantic efforts to repair or bypass the damage. Assuming the situation he'd caused continued for some time, things would remain relatively stable for a few days then they'd break down very quickly. Without power and communications, Food, transport, fuel and water would immediately stop. Law Enforcement, the Army and the National Guard would be deploying everywhere by now to try to contain things, and they'd succeed to

some extent.

The Predators day-to-day lifestyle would completely count against them, they had a week or two of food at most in their apartments. The Predators would go where the Food was, till that quickly ran out, then the preying would begin. In Somalia and Haiti when food ran low the guns came out. The refugees took from the aid workers, then the armed militias took from the refugees. They robbed aid convoys and stole from those who still had food, shooting anyone who got in their way. Nobody thought beyond themselves or their immediate family, starting right at the top with the leaders living on the wealth of the countries resources while their people starved, down to the soldiers and police officers constantly stopping people at checkpoints to demand bribes. There was no reason to believe American blacks would be any different, if anything they were even less prepared than their overseas cousins despite the enormous monies lavished on them for generations, they didn't plan for the future, right down to the personal level, but relied on the Government to supply everything even in times of crisis. If the situation still hadn't changed by that point, then things would likely deteriorate almost overnight. His guess was that in any drawn out civil emergency with no large scale contingency, the urban population would abruptly nosedive. The question was the timescale and order of events. Anyone with any sense would be leaving the dangerous places immediately.

He strode over hills, through untouched Forests and across clean pure streams. His thoughts were of his family, the skills they'd learned and how they'd coped in his absence. He hoped they'd be fine; in any event there was no going back now. There were weeks of food built up out there. The Birds, the winds, the rustling leaves, bubbling water and his own crunching footsteps were the only things he heard as he walked along the edge of a Creek 10 miles from home. He didn't mind in the slightest getting soaked from head to toe if need be as he went through them, it was warm enough that he'd quickly dry off, but he preferred to check for shallower areas first. Home. He was amused how quickly he'd left behind his former life, now he was thinking only of the daily essentials out here.

As it started getting toward evening, he stopped and set up the Tent and lit a small fire under a partly overcast sky by the River bank. There was time for a quick spot of fishing, and he quickly caught and prepared a Fat fish, devoured it with Bread and a couple of Apples and a handful of Nuts before dozing off in the tent.

The next morning he checked the scanner once more, and in the midst of the crackling of distant lightning bolts he heard a few radio stations broadcasting at low power using generator power. Suddenly he heard his name mentioned. It had to happen sooner or later, even with the damage to systems, log files and data everywhere there had to be enough recoverable information to get his details, but it was still a shock for it to happen. This far away it was hard to hear but terms like "federal offence", "act of worldwide sabotage", "first degree murder" and "international terrorist" jumped out of the static. There was something about difficulty in getting to his house and holding the crime scene for investigators. That sounded like a euphemism for "The Gangs have taken over the area and are rioting against Police efforts to control them".

He packed up again and moved on across the stream and into the Forest once more. The line of storm clouds caught up with him as he crossed a line of low hills several hours from home, the skies went from clear and warm to overcast and windy as the front rolled in, then the heavens opened. Rain so heavy it reduced visibility to less than a hundred meters sluiced off leaves and

cascaded down gullies which were dry minutes before and turned rivulets to muddy torrents while the skies flashed and roared with lightning. He didn't care, this close to home nothing was going to stop him from reuniting with his family, he only took more caution as he trudged through the rain and mud and into familiar territory once more. The rain clouds left him behind and the sun shone as he rounded the last hill.

He needn't have worried; he spotted Barbara putting out some washing as he walked up the gentle slope toward the Log cabin. He'd thought to walk up quietly, but she whirled at the Footsteps. Her Wilderness instincts had kicked in, and she was alert for anything out of the ordinary.

"My Husband, the Domestic Terrorist..." she cried as they hugged.

"It worked, I think it really worked, my god it was fast, you should've seen it Barbara, it took less than 10 minutes to bring everything down!"

"Matthew said it would only take a few minutes, I couldn't believe that until it happened."

"Matt, he's here!"

"He's about 5 miles away over that ridge yonder", she indicated, "He turned up a few days after you left and let us know you'd got back safely, and he told us when it would happen. We heard it all go down 2 nights ago on the radio, they broke in with news alerts then everything went dead. There was a report last night that they tried to bring the systems back online but your Virus took them down again. I still didn't fully believe it until they started calling you by name."

"Yes, I heard it this morning. There's going to be a lot of unhappy Feds out there."

That was a cunning touch of Matthews. He'd never have thought to leave exceptions to otherwise total destruction in order to cause future havoc.

"And yesterday he told us you got out safely and were on your way back here."

"Where did he get that information from?", Aaron was startled.

"All he'd say was that he has contacts."

Definitely Matt, discreet to the last about everything.

"How's Matt doing for himself?"

"Well, he's not by himself; he brought his daughter and a couple of Lady friends out with him."

Yes, that was definitely Matthew too, he thought. He was always a risk-taker with women. Aaron immediately thought of the Chinese Tarot card for 'Trouble'. On it was a picture of two women under one roof. He chuckled to himself at the thought.

"Why aren't I surprised to hear that?"

"He checked on us a few times and brought us venison in return for veggies, his gardens had almost no time to grow before he moved out there."

"That sounds like a good deal to me!", Aaron gleefully replied.

"He built his place in a month with a couple of friends of his, you wouldn't believe what they've done over there", nodding over the ridge.

"Let me guess, he's built a mansion out of firewood?"

"Close... He also left something down here for you when you arrived", and she took him down to the River.

"Where?", he asked, not seeing anything out of the ordinary.

"Down there, among the Rocks"

"Don't tell me!"

Oh yes, he'd left a dozen cans of Beer cooling in the mountain stream. That's the one absolutely indispensable thing Matt can't do without, he thought. He'd probably brought a couple of cases of the stuff out on his very first trip.

"He also said to tell you that the next time you build a Log house, use a pack animal to carry everything instead of bringing it in a bit at a time by hand."

That guy was an information sponge in school, he was no different now.

"And he said you and him have a lot to talk about when you meet."

"Yes, I think there's much more to him than we knew, things he's hinted at... Billy and Cassie?"

"They're off fishing at a spot they've found, they'll be back soon. You've taught them to be good little providers, they're doing fine out here."

"No, we've taught them", he quickly corrected her. They weren't just a family now, they were a team.

'Teach them young and they'll do fine', had been his late fathers saying. He didn't know if he believed in an afterlife, but he was sure his father would have approved.

"I'm glad Matts here, I was worried we were going to be a bit too lonely out here, we can't have the kids by themselves for too long", he commented.

"I wouldn't say that", Barbara smiled as she replied, "Wait till it gets dark and see, they've made a few friends across the river."

"Oh?", he was shocked at that. He'd thought they were in the middle of absolute nowhere.

"While you were gone Billy spotted human tracks a few miles away, definitely not animal. And across the stream the kids found a couple of old huts, long abandoned. But there are people up there, most just arrived, some came years ago, a few have always been here. They keep to themselves a lot, some of them are a bit strange, we stay away from them."

No, that shouldn't have been such a surprise, not when he thought about it. Not everyone willingly goes to the cities when circumstances change, a few people always chose to stay behind when mines closed, mills shut down and

industry moved elsewhere. The area they were in had more than likely been settled a long time before it became a National park, and people who didn't want to leave could make it very hard to be found. That book on tracking animals he'd brought along had more than paid for itself then. He was looking forward to meeting those people, the things he could learn from them, and maybe trade with them...

Barbara commented that she was feeling tired, took her boots off and sat by the stream with her feet dipping in the cold water. He joined her and began massaging her back muscles the way she liked. She leaned back into the gentle pressure of his hands and let his fingers work their magic, easing her tension. Her body language was speaking volumes again, she flicked her hair back the way he liked and lay back in the grass to relax in the warm sun by the stream. So the two of them were alone. He succumbed to temptation, and began tickling and nibbling her ear.

She ignored him at first, and then protested "Look, I haven't washed since yesterday, I've been sweating, can't you wait?"

"Well, so have I, and you don't seem to mind."

"I don't know when the kids will be back."

"Then we'd better make it quick then."

He kept playing with her ear, moved down and began nibbling her neck where it met the shoulder.

"You're not going to stop aren't you?"

"No."

"Dammit Aaron, lets make Love then!"

Afterward, she remarked "Oooo... I've missed that, it's been much too long."

"Yes, it's been a whole three weeks."

"Three weeks and 2 days... You know, for a long time I've had the feeling you like me more when I haven't washed."

"Do you believe in pheromones, Barbara?"

"You make me worry sometimes."

He twirled his fingers through her hair and rubbed her back in the long grass as she lay with her head on his chest. She slowly relaxed and was on the verge of falling asleep on top of him, and then they heard the kids coming through the Forest. They quickly tidied themselves up then she called out to them, "Kids - Dads home!", as they appeared through the trees.

Billy with his rifle and Cassie with her fishing line ran over, and he held them in his arms.

"Way to go Dad! The radio said you trashed the whole system!" said Billy.

"It wasn't that hard, everything was too connected and centralized", he grinned.

"Hey Dad, what's it like being the Worlds most wanted?", asked Cassy.

"It feels good", he replied cautiously, "But this is only the start of it.

After what the Bush administration has done, to be hated by them is something to be proud of", he replied.

"Is there anyone they actually like?" she asked, with Childs innocence.

That was one of the rare times he was at a complete loss for words, she'd just hit straighter to the point than many Adults ever would.

"I really don't know Honey; I'd have to think about that one"

"What does our area look like now?", Billy asked.

"Just remember it the way it used to be", was all he could say.

"That bad?", asked Barbara.

He nodded. Words just couldn't describe that place now.

"Three fish today, you're getting good at that Cassy", he changed the subject. She grinned at the compliment. "Lets help Mum then I'll make dinner", he said, taking the fish.

As he fried the fish steaks and potato slices he'd prepared, Barbara chatted with him about the news items they'd overheard.

"There's been something on the radio all day about a really big underground rescue operation in progress near New York; they wouldn't say anything else about it."

"I know who they're looking for", he grinned. He told them about the live program from the data control centre and who was hosting it when the power died.

Barbara nearly spat her drink out, half from shock and half from laughing.

"Oh my god... Oh this just keeps on getting better and better... How did you know he'd be there?"

"I didn't, someone else did though."

He told her about the anonymous phone call the morning after returning home, and his suspicion that it was from a Resistance movement. A real one.

Barbaras smile lit up the room at the news, and then she looked quizzical.

"Why didn't they contact you in person and tell you everything?"

"I've been wondering about that. They probably couldn't, they might've been under surveillance themselves."

"Or else they didn't want to go down as well if you got caught", she retorted.

"That too", he had to admit.

After Dinner, he and the Children shared a couple of drinks outside on the deckchair for the good work they'd done looking after themselves and their Mother. Barbara politely declined, she never drank much anyway, and a couple of months before their abrupt departure she seemed to have suddenly sworn off alcohol completely. Both of them were of the opinion that Alcohol could be treated responsibly or otherwise, just like Firearms. It was the user who abused them.

"Don't forbid it, then they won't lose control when they get it", he'd once said to Barbara, which she agreed made perfect sense when she thought about it. So he'd taken to rewarding Billy with a glass of Beer after Dinner for doing the lawns, for instance. And Barbara likewise occasionally rewarded Cassy with a glass of wine after she'd helped with jobs around the home.

She was still taking the supplements she'd started using some months ago, he noted. He'd glimpsed a couple of chemist receipts but hadn't thought much about it till now. She was very fit for her age thanks to all the exercise they'd done so he didn't really see the point in exceeding what nature already provided. Oh well, they couldn't do her any harm either he thought.

And just as Barbara had said, from a few of the nearby hills across the river there were wisps of smoke rising from places that'd been seemingly devoid of life only a month ago. The closest was probably only a couple of miles away. He'd never bothered to head over that way before, but during their endless explorations the kids had crossed over as he'd taught them; paddling over at a slow point of the stream with a cut log as support. And while he was away they'd found an easier way across, wading through shallows then jumping over rocks to the other side. Venturing into the hills on the other side, they'd quickly found signs of habitation then other people up there, and they and Barbara had made friends with a few of them.

A few minutes later he was chatting with Barbara when Billy came running out of the house with the transistor radio.

"Dad, they're talking about you!"

The Vice President was speaking in an absolute rage, not Mr. Bush. That was promising.

"... this scum, through willful endeavor, has single-handedly sabotaged the Economy and Defences of our great nation and those of much of the developed World. All essential services are in tatters, the civilian infrastructure and supports have essentially stopped, cities are in chaos with refugees fleeing them, it may take years to rebuild the damage to systems everywhere, and indeed the very reputation of this country."

"Well, that's the best description of Mr. Bush's rule I've heard in a long time", Aaron remarked.

"Shhhh!!", went Barbara.

"This wasn't just some teenage hacker out to prove a point; this was a deliberately planned, intentionally destructive attack on the very fabric of our nation. We are bringing the full Military and Law Enforcement resources of this country to bear to bring Aaron Winters to justice for this act of utter treachery, we will spare no efforts to hunt him down wherever he may be and arrest him and anyone who may be harboring him. The mindless damage he has achieved is so extensive that transport, food, water and fuel distribution have stopped for an indeterminate period, we're hearing word that small scale

looting and rioting has taken place in a few centers but has been contained. We are distributing his photograph and are urging any citizen with any information on his whereabouts to contact their local Law Enforcement, a reward offer is still being finalized, but it is certain to be over ten million..."

Aaron reached over and switched off the radio in disgust.

"Battle the symptoms and not the illness, see where that gets you", he muttered.

"I never dreamed even when I was young that I'd be living in a Forest, married to the most wanted person in the country", she said, looking upset.

"Don't forget, we've also got two kids who're turning out just fine, and a view out over scenery not many people get to see in this day and age."

He took her in his arms and they hugged, surrounded by endless miles of stark trees, twenty miles from anywhere. All they could do now was keep planning one step ahead and surviving.

"And think on the positive side, we've both wanted more family time for ourselves and for the kids. We'll have plenty of that now", he commented.

Barbara exhaled sharply, she froze with an odd expression as if uncertain what to say, then settled for turning and grinning broadly at him.

"What?", he finally asked.

She subtly changed the subject.

"That's a lot of money they're offering, would anyone you know be likely to..."

He shook his head. No, Stevie and Matt would never talk; they'd been through too much together. Not to mention they'd probably sooner or later end up being wanted for questioning by virtue of knowing him, and Stevie had blood on his hands too. Matt couldn't care less, it made no difference to him, but he hoped Stevie wouldn't be too upset. Even he hadn't been told of the electronic storm brewing just across the road.

"We'll see how long that much money has value, until things are working again it's good for nothing", he commented.

And if things stayed the way they were for any length of time, he thought, it'd be worthless inflation money.

Barbara commented that she was feeling tired and out of energy, she wouldn't be up late that night. She squeezed his wrist, running her fingers along his before heading inside.

The first hints of mist appeared in the rain-soaked forest even before the sun dipped below the horizon, if it stayed clear there was likely to be a tremendous fog the next morning. The gray shadow band rose above the western horizon as the light faded, and Aaron and Billy donned jackets to shield themselves from the cool air which had begun settling in for the night and watched the stars gradually taking over the sky from the deckchair under the overhanging roof. Barbara lit a couple of candles to read by while the forest

faded to an outline and the full moon rose, faintly illuminating the trees. Billy went inside to warm up, and Aaron was about to follow when he spotted flickering hazy lights in the distance. Dozens of them, lining the hilltops and ridges near the distant town.

He gasped, called out to Barbara to come and see as he peered through binoculars. He could see cooking fires and occasional flashes from torch beams, and many more fires were betrayed by their flickering glow on the trees around them.

"Look at that!... Where did all those people come from?"

"They started turning up out there a week ago, I asked Matt about it, and he didn't know either."

He thought over the implications. That was only a couple of days before he'd released the virus. If the two were related, there was only one conclusion.

They'd been ordered there.

There was something else too, in the distance a featureless dim red glow originating somewhere beyond the distant hills was pulsing on the underside of the clouds at the horizon.

He sensed Barbara stiffen as they realized at the same moment what the glow was.

"Oh my god...", she murmured.

He'd thought it would take weeks, if at all, to reach that stage, not days. From where they were they could only imagine the damage being done. If they could see it from that distance, it had to be almost a Firestorm, and that was only a large town, not a city. The guts of that poor town were being torched by the inhabitants.

The Gangs thought processes weren't hard to guess, they hadn't changed at all since the '93 riots, because there wasn't the slightest encouragement, or discouragement if you preferred, for them to change. It was almost an equation; any failure of the system or the slightest real or imagined provocation, combined with inadequate Law Enforcement who weren't prepared or allowed to promptly contain the situation, factored with warm temperatures, meant they burned their own neighborhoods and attacked innocent firemen and passerby. And when the inevitable looting occurred, it was always of the essentials of life, such as Cigarettes, Tobacco and Televisions. Factor in the sudden lack of Electricity, Alcohol, Food and Welfare, and the result was visible across the skyline. And we were supposed to respect these people and think that they were somehow being 'held back'?

In the early part of the previous century when Lunatics burned city blocks, stoned cars and attacked innocent people, the Military quite correctly went in firing with heavy machine guns, curfews, on the spot executions, and in one case, dynamite dropped from aircraft to bring the situation back under control. It was an immediate and justified solution to outrageous behavior. There were things that absolutely weren't tolerated in years past, there were simple guidelines to tolerable behaviors, stay with them and you were fine, step over and you paid for it. Now, justice depended on the viewpoint and who you were, absolutely never on your own actions.

But whatever happened, the genie was out of the bottle, the storm system had

boiled over.

He'd carried out his duty as a Father, a Husband and as a Man and got his family safe. Now he was ready to do his duty for his Country and join the fight for Freedom.

The War on Terror had begun.

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"I have given my life to try to alleviate the sufferings of Africa. There is something that all white men who have lived here like I must learn and know: that these individuals are a sub-race. They have neither the intellectual, mental, or emotional abilities to equate or to share equally with white men in any function of our civilization. I have given my life to try to bring them the advantages which our civilization must offer, but I have become well aware that we must retain this status: the superior and they the inferior. For whenever a white man seeks to live among them as their equals they will either destroy him or devour him. And they will destroy all of his work. Let white men from anywhere in the world, who would come to Africa, remember that you must continually retain this status; you the master and they the inferior like children that you would help or teach. Never fraternize with them as equals. Never accept them as your social equals or they will devour you. They will destroy you."

- Dr. Albert Schweitzer, winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for peace, in his 1961 book, From My African Notebook.