

Pax Americana Chapter 41- Teach Your Children Well

Teach Your Children (Crosby, Stills and Nash)

**You, who are on the road,
Must have a code that you can live by.
And so, become yourself,
Because the past is just a good bye.
Teach your children well,
Their father's hell did slowly go by.
And feed them on your dreams,
The one they picks, the one you'll know by.**

**Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,
So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.**

**And you, of tender years,
Can't know the fears that your elders grew by.
And so please help them with your youth,
They seek the truth before they can die.
Teach your parents well,
Their children's hell will slowly go by.
And feed them on your dreams,
The one they picks, the one you'll know by.**

**Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,
So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.....**

The CJ5 bounced along the rutted road leaving a light trail of dust in its wake. It had been three months since they made the last run to town and everyone was looking forward seeing civilization again. They had survived the winter isolated in their remote alpine valley. Spring had finally gained more than a foothold and filled the mountain with life once again.

Kevin remembered the day when they first bounced in on this dirt road. The summer had been glorious despite all the apprehension in the air when they pulled out of their driveway in early June to begin the first summer vacation they had taken in five years. 9/11 had certainly shaken everybody up along with all the revelations regarding a never before heard of group of Muslim extremists off in some dirt pile of a county on the other side of the planet. War drums were pounding but there was no enemy in sight. The dust settled and things appeared to be headed back to normal. Oh, sure, we were in a war against terrorism, but that's not like a "real war", like against a country or something. Regardless of the constant noise pitched out by the media on a daily basis they decided to take off

and get a look at land the Jorgensons had purchased sight unseen through a rural property newsletter. His wife had her misgivings on the deal, but the price was right and they did have the money in savings, so throwing caution to the wind they purchased their little spot of heaven. Located just beyond the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, their thirty-five acre plot of raw undeveloped rural property turned out to be the best spur of the moment purchase they had ever made.

Kevin was glad that they had been able to talk their eldest daughter Samantha into spending the summer with them. Having just graduated from high school she would soon be off to college and out on her own. The entire family had agreed that this would probably be the last chance they would have to spend a summer together, so off they went on a grand adventure to their new property. Little did they realize that they would be spending more than just three months together.

It wasn't until they began to head back home at the end of that summer that their isolation became readily apparent. During their absence from the daily grind and the constant blast of the news of the world, everything had suddenly turned inside out. The dire situation hit the Jorgensons like a load of bricks. Plague had broken out everywhere, cities were now death traps, people were dying by the thousands, and the very fabric of the nation was ripping apart. The few locals that would even talk to them shared the grim news they had missed during their summer hiatus. Panic was spreading far and wide, the nation was at war now in some stupid sandbox and there were even rumors that actual fighting had broken out within the country itself.

When Kevin, the patriarch of the family, contacted the local sheriff concerning how he could get his family home, clear on the other side of the country, he was not greeted with the best of news. There were no travel permits being authorized to anyone if not of an official or absolute emergency nature. The entire country was under martial law and he and his family were stuck right where they were for now.

The Jeep splashed through another of the dozen or so small creeks that dotted the landscape. Kevin thought back to the family meeting that night in the local steak and ale restaurant. Even though he was somewhat old fashioned and patriarchal in his ways, he was wise enough to know that this decision facing them was one that had to involve the entire family. He remembered looking about the table at the most important people in his life. Across from him sat his wife Stephanie. She was as petite as he was large, with long dark exotic hair that she usually tried to restrain in a ponytail or rolled into a tight bun. Her handsome looks gleaned from the mix of Irish, Native American and Jewish stock. She was as level headed and intelligent as any man could possibly stand. It was at her job as a nurse in a small medical clinic that they first met while she was fixing him up after a little accident on the job. From there nature took its course and a year later they tied the knot. Kevin always felt that besides being his best friend she

was also his strong right arm. One tough little banty hen, he often thought.

His eldest daughter at eighteen, Samantha was dark and exotic like her mother, tall like her father and with a temper that matched both. His second daughter Amanda, sixteen, was small like her mother, but drew her full head of shock blond hair from her father. She was the chatterbox of the family and, matched with her bubbly personality, seemed to meld the best of both sides of the genes into the happiest of mixes. The youngest, but far from the smallest, was his son Kevin Jr., or Buck as he was called by the family. At fourteen, he was nearly Samantha's height and would soon be pressing to match his father's six foot four frame. Buck was calm and keenly observant, a lad that rarely missed the slightest detail and was as skilled an outdoorsman as his father. Kevin hailed from tall blond Scandinavian stock and while he never went beyond high school in his education, his voracious appetite for books coupled with his experience in the service as an Army Ranger and later while assigned to the 10th Mountain developed his love for the outdoors and the high country, as well as his extensive backwoods skills. Back at home he was a heavy equipment operator for the county water district. Here in the highlands of Wyoming, he was in his element.

That night in the restaurant seemed like it was a long time ago in another world. The winter had been tough, and while they were used to the cold that came with the season at home in Pennsylvania, it was the isolation that weighed heaviest on them. Modern man has so much constantly going on about them that they never really consider the quiet that is out there. Also, for the first time in their lives, day to day survival was a reality. Nothing turned on with the flick of a switch or the twist of a knob. They had been thrust back technologically over one hundred years and that was not an easy thing to live with. But the family endured.

Fortunately, the locals were still accepting traveler's checks. Though Stephanie's quick thinking, they managed to have their entire savings wired to the local independent bank and converted into hard currency before the communication lines began to fragment. It was Stephanie that seemed to fully realize the implications of the bits and pieces of news that were getting through. Her years of nursing experience allowed her to pick up on vital clues that were trickling in despite the mandated news blackouts. The information was sketchy, but she had come to the chilling conclusion that there was an epidemic sweeping the nation. Kevin picked up the alarm bells from his wife and then he too pieced together the inferences as much from what was not being said as from what was leaking through. Together, they sat down and spent two solid days brainstorming their options as a family. Then...they went on a buying spree!

Buck likened their situation to being the first colonists on a new planet. What would you take with you if you had a limited budget and there would be no resupply for a long time...if ever? It was amazing how high up on the list toilet paper and feminine napkins suddenly became. Kevin made his list based around

the tools he would need to not only construct a suitable shelter but to maintain that shelter and the family in the months or possibly years ahead. Stephanie leaned heavily towards keeping the family healthy and strove to plan for every possible medical contingency, even to include her becoming pregnant. Samantha, always level headed and science oriented combed, scoured the local community for any form of alternative power that they could use and hit every first- and second-hand bookstore in the area gathering up any sort of book that contained slightest bit of knowledge that they would need in the weeks and months ahead. Amanda tackled their requirements for growing, cooking and preserving the foods they gathered. Buck began by helping his father and Amanda in their searches but suddenly was drawn away with the idea of fulfilling their needs through hunting, trapping and gathering. He returned one afternoon with a shoulder load of traps, trapping tools, scents and several books on the subject. He then carted his father off to the local pawn and outdoor shop to meet the old man that ran the place he had befriended. Three hours later and nearly two grand lighter in the pocketbook the pair made their way back to rendezvous with the girls knowing full well that they'd have to do some serious talking to convince them of the validity of their purchases. It was to become an ongoing debate that lasted most of the winter.

The Jeep towed the trailer filled with firewood into town just after nine in the morning. It was a smallish mountain community that supported close to twenty-five hundred souls. During their last visit, people moved about and things seemed almost normal, considering the events taking place in the rest of the country. This morning, however, as they drove into town, it took on more of the appearance of a ghost town. The few folks they did see out and about seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere quickly. The town square was largely devoid of any signs of life as Kevin pulled over to let the girls off to do their shopping.

He leaned over to give his wife a kiss and spoke softly to her. "Keep a close eye on the girls, hon. I'll be right back after we pick up a few things at Richardson's store."

"Something bothering you, Kevin?"

"I don't know," he said, shaking his head. "Just seems a little too quiet, or something."

"Well it is a little early, perhaps." She pecked him on the cheek and jumped out of the Jeep.

"Just the same, hon, keep your eyes open." He looked around the quiet square. "tsk, just doesn't seem...." His voice trailed off.

She chuckled at her over cautious husband. "We'll be fine dear, just three girls out on a town having a shopping spree." She chuckled as she walked away.

Kevin slipped the Jeep into gear as Buck jumped up into the front seat and snapped in his seatbelt. They took off with a slight jerk and headed over to the Richardson's.

Professor Malcolm Danielson had recovered from his beating and he, along with the group quartered in Barracks 21, had settled down into the routine of captivity. With each passing day trapped behind the barbed wire, the rage that had begun on that first morning when he was arrested slowly simmered and gained in strength. He was absolutely appalled at the utter passivity of his fellow "detainees". They blabbered on continually about how justice would triumph if they were just patient enough and didn't start anything with their captors. That was the furthest thought from Malcolm's mind. He wanted someone's cajones nailed to the top of a telephone pole, and he didn't care if they were still attached or not.

His mind was constantly running through escape scenarios, analyzing every angle and detail, trying to improve the odds. He knew, he absolutely knew, that somewhere, somehow he would find the flaw in the cage he now found himself in. He felt his greatest advantage was buried in a piece of his past that not even his ex wife knew of. During his exuberant youth, when he was first in college, he found himself drifting in the wild currents of that era of protest. The next thing he realized was that he being indoctrinated into a radical underground group on the fringe of the spotlight that shone brightly on the Weathermen and Black Panthers of that day.

Malcolm had been having flashbacks to that era of government high handedness, when the FBI and various agencies of the federal government seemed to be everywhere, digging into everything and abusing the rights of everyone. Malcolm's smartest move had been to suppress his real identity even from his fellow anarchists at that time. Later, he would come to the realization that the group he had joined under the pretense of freeing mankind from the tyranny of Big Brother, was actually more interested in committing acts of destruction and rage against the machine and then taking the place of Big Brother to force their ideals upon the masses. He had no desire to trade one oppressor for another and one day simply walked away from the group and back into his own life. But the lessons learned from that dark hidden past could now very well be the salvation to his escape and survival. It was now his task to resurrect the urban guerrilla that he once was and to suppress the passivity of academia that he was now surrounded by. It began first thing the next morning with pushups.

Shadows moved through the ruins that surrounded the 'Castle'. Like overgrown sewer rats, they scurried in and around the broken buildings of the perimeter. Hungry eyes stared across the darkness to the cold brick walls that sealed them out. The brothers inside the Castle would not share their bounty, so now the pack had the right to take it from them.

Jamal slowly, carefully, climbed to the top floor of one of the few remaining buildings across from the Castle. He had traveled this way many times over the last several weeks trying to find a chink in the armor of the complex that stood defiantly before him. Many of the surviving gangs scattered throughout the dying city had heard of the Castle and the rumors of its success. It was also known that virtually no one, outside the actual members of that closed community itself, was ever allowed inside its' protective walls. Occasionally they would accept a new member, but not unless the prospect brought to the restricted community some skill or knowledge that they needed. While Damian's group recognized that they were indeed a lifeboat cast out upon the ocean and could not save everyone that wanted to survive, the rest of the surrounding city did not understand this concept. Jamal watched as the assault slowly crept into its position in the early morning hours.

It took a few seconds until the sound of the klaxon registered in Damian's groggy mind. Then the adrenaline pump shot a panic load of kick ass screaming through his veins. He couldn't move fast enough as he fumbled into his pants and boots.

"Thank God for speed laces!" He mumbled to himself as he jerked his right foot into the boot and quickly locked it in.

Seconds later he was racing through the passage way to his battle station, half in and half out of his battle dress, trying to swing his arm into his combat vest, carry his rifle and calling into the emergency radio to get a fix on the trouble all at the same time. He could hear gunfire, a lot of gunfire, and that was not good. His vest finally on, he paused just half a second to secure the small Motorola radio into its place and plug in his mike and headset. Now with both hands free he picked up the pace ready for action.

The building rocked slightly from the explosion and Damian slid to a sudden stop. The door he had just passed, not twenty feet behind him in the corridor had popped open from the blast that now filled the passageway with dust and smoke. Damian jacked a round into the chamber of his BM 59 and dropped to the floor. Scurrying like large sewer rats the gang bangers emerged from the smoke and dust filled room only to be met with the bark of Damian's 7.62mm rounds shredding them as they cleared the doorway. The big rifle bucked against his steady hold and the first three members of the assault team crumpled on the

floor in front of the doorway. Damian then moved his sight picture slightly to the right and coughed out three more rounds that blasted through the doorjamb and nearby wall slamming into the next man trying to hide behind the not so solid wall. His scream as the hot brass ripped through his soft flesh froze the second team just now entering in the room up the ladder through the blasted away metal shutters.

Damian rushed to the doorway and off handedly poked the hot barrel into the smoky darkness and emptied the magazine across the room into the dark hole that had been a sealed window. His second round found purchase and caught the top intruder on the ladder square in the forehead flipping him back off and bouncing down onto his teammates beneath. A second banger lost his grip and joined his partner in their thirty-foot drop to the solid bone crunching concrete below. Damian quickly locked in a fresh mag and continued to advance spraying a wall of thirty-caliber supersonic whoop ass into the void beyond. He couldn't hear the panic that he was creating on the ladder just below the window as the terrified invading gutter rats scrambled to put as much distance between them and the screaming death that was blasting out of the window above. All he could hear was the increasing pitch of his ringing ears as he blasted away within the confines of that small room.

Several reinforcements suddenly materialized beside Damian and added their firepower to his, shredding the remaining gang bangers that had failed to seek shelter across the street. Damian threw himself into the most forward shooter just before the gutter rats return fire would have cut him to pieces as he stood in the middle of the window laying down a steady rain of death on the retreating vermin. Four BM-59's barked in unison into the dark rubble across the street as Damian knocked the ladder away from the wall and dropped out of the way as a makeshift steel shutter was laid over the open window and wedged into place. He signaled for two of the shooters there with him to remain and secure the window while the rest followed him out of the room and onto the next battle.

A few minute after dropping off the girls Kevin and his son Buck arrived at a burned out relic that had been the Richardson's outdoors store. The pair looked at each other in a confused manner, then turned back to the scene that stood before them.

"Pop!" Buck was looking and pointing across the parking lot.

Kevin followed his son's gaze and caught the glint of something metallic all around a derelict vehicle on the far edge of the parking lot. As they pulled up closer Kevin stopped the jeep and got out to have a closer look. The ground was covered with brass, .223 to be exact. He bent and retrieved one of several hundred that littered the ground around the shot up car.

“Government stamped 5.56. Hmmm,” he said to himself.

The vehicle he stood next to had been riddled from one side, the side facing the Richardson’s store. But it wasn’t punked from little .22’s or .223’s. Who ever had returned fire in this firefight was a firm believer in thirty-caliber and up rounds. A couple of enormous holes went clear through each side of the car and everything in between. He couldn’t be sure but it also looked like some serious bleeding had taken place on the backside of the vehicle.

“Dad, come take a look at this!” His son was over by the remains of the store.

As Kevin walked past the parked Jeep, he reached in and grabbed the Marlin .30-30 and then walked over to the side of the building where his son was standing. He slowly scanned the immediate area surrounding the store as he walked but didn’t see anything that seemed out of the ordinary. Buck showed him the pockmarked brick around one of the stores side windows. Looking in through the broken glass he could see several hundred shell casings scattered through the muck and debris around the window area.

“There’s been some serious shooting here, Dad. I don’t like the looks of this.” Buck commented as he too scanned the perimeter for any sign of danger.

“Neither do I, son, neither do I.” Buck turned and followed his son’s gaze. “What say we grab the girls and take a run up to the Richardson’s place? You’ve been there, right?”

“Yeah, sure, Dad, it’s not very far from here.” He turned and pointed. “Just up the road a bit and on the other side of that ridge there.”

“Good, let’s get the girls and find out what’s going on here. I don’t like the looks of this...not one bit!”

Samantha could tell that trouble had just entered the store by the look on the owners face when she looked up. Sam, without overtly looking, quickly oriented herself to the room and everything in it. Most important was the whereabouts of her sister, off to the left looking at material, and her mother, over picking out thread. She could hear at least three sets of feet in heavy boots walking up behind her. Her warning sensors were ringing off the hook and she knew this was not going to end nicely. Slowly, seductively, she turned around to face the three approaching figures. The first thing that caught her eye besides the uniforms were the guns they were carrying; M-16’s and pistols in military holsters. They were Homeland Security Force troops and she didn’t like the way they were eyeballing her. The leading simian’s face was filled with a huge shit eating grin. His two cronies stood at either side and also held her in their hungry

gaze. She flipped back her wild black hair and smiled coyly at the trio.

“So where have you been hiding cutie?” The lead goon slobbered.

Just then Amanda popped up out the side aisle. “Hey Sis, check this out...” Then she froze as soon as she locked eyes on the three troopers just a few feet from her older sister.

“SHIT BOSS, ANOTHER ONE!” exclaimed the trooper closest to Amanda.

Now Stephanie was suddenly aware that life had just become a little more complicated and she stepped into the mix.

“Come on girls we’ve got more shopping to do.” She stepped between the troopers and her girls and tried to wave them past. “Excuse us soldier.” She said to clear the way for their retreat from the store.

“Not so fast there, lady!” The lead troopers responded and held out his arm. “Where’s your papers honey?”

Stephanie looked at him dumbfounded. “Papers...what papers?”

“The little papers that say you got permission to be out and about, lady.” the until-now silent trooper teased.

“I don’t need any papers.” She answered indignantly “Come on, girls, we’re leaving.”

Suddenly the lead trooper shoved Stephanie back towards Amanda and stepped in to block their way.

“You know, boys, I think these girls need a little full body cavity search, don’t you? They could be some of those domestic terrorists the Captain’s always harping about!”

Apish grins filled the faces of the lesser two troopers.

“Say, Sarge, can we start with the little blond one?”

“Yeah, she looks like a terrorist to me, Sarge, start with her!”

Stephanie stood up and with her left arm waved her youngest daughter behind her as she retreated from the threat to her front. Her right hand slid across the face of the open display case as she backed away. Suddenly Samantha stepped forward assuming an attitude that Stephanie had never witnessed in her eldest daughter before.

“Say wouldn’t you rather start with me, soldier boys?” She coyly asked as she stepped forward.

Stephanie had never realize the true animal magnetism that her daughter could turn on and off like a light switch. She had never viewed her daughter as a sexual creature, but the flash of sensuality that she had emblazoned towards the three troopers would probably have made a fleet of sailor’s toes curl. All eyes were suddenly on Samantha as she stepped to within just a few feet of the three google-eyed troopers. Stephanie suddenly felt something round and cold against her finger tips. She wrapped her hands around it and waited.

Samantha turned just before she reached the center trooper, who seemed to be in charge. Her mind raced through the numerous katas that she had spent endless hours mastering to test for her black belt. She had no idea where she was going to go with this but her mother and sister were in trouble and she was not about to allow anything to happen to them. An image flashed through her mind, and a microsecond later her first kick snapped through the air and caught the doe eyed trooper on the left square of his Adam’s apple, crushing the cartilage and permanently sealing his wind pipe. Her right leg whipped back and, adding the momentum of her upper body to the motion, brought the heel of her foot squarely through the once solid knee of the mouthy sergeant. Bone and ligaments shattered and snapped as she mule kicked through the joint. The lightening bolt of pain blasted across his synaptic highways and overloaded his primate brain. Nothing came out of his gaping mouth as he vainly tried to gasp for air. Samantha coiled her upper body and looking over her left shoulder released a spinning back kick that slammed her left heel into the side of the now broken kneed sergeant’s head. Her aim was a little off and instead of nailing him square on the temple her blow shattered his zygomatic arch and blew out the orbit of his left eye. His brain rebounded first off the skull nearest the impact of Samantha’s heel and then off the opposite side of his brain housing as he lapsed into unconsciousness.

The images of the sudden carnage unleashed by their intended sex toy caught the third trooper by surprise. In the few seconds that it took for him to realize that it was they that were in fact under attack, his two partners were dropping to the floor. He blinked and then started to act by bringing his AR up to blast the bitch that had just stomped his two partners in as many seconds, when suddenly he was paralyzed with a piercing pain in the small of his back. A small but strong hand gripped his windpipe and was pulling him backwards to the aisle floor. Stephanie had a death grip on the aluminum knitting needle as she plunged it into the soldier’s right kidney and pulled him down. Adding her weight to his she rolled at the last second throwing her hip into him and slamming his head into the hardwood floor with a resounding deep, hollow crack. He gripped the trigger of his rifle as his head impacted with the floor but nothing happened. He had failed in the time allotted to take it off safe.

Samantha picked up the first trooper's AR and flipped the safety off. Amanda helped her mother out from underneath the last trooper and for the first time in her life had absolutely nothing to say. Sam calmly walked over to each soldier in turn and placed a round squarely into their brain housing group. As Sam finished the last trooper off the doorway suddenly burst open. She spun around to face her father and brother as they stood a few feet into the store eyeballing the scene before them.

"It's Ok Pop...we're safe!"

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 42- War Drums

"Hit the other fellow, as quick as you can, and as hard as you can, where it hurts him most, when he ain't lookin'."

Unrecorded British Sergeant Major (On the definition of strategy)

"A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective."

Sun-tzu, The Art of War. Strategic Assessments

"The only easy day was yesterday."

US Navy SEALs

The battle was on, and Damian could just make out from the staccato of panicked overlapping radio reports that there were at least three other breaches of the perimeter walls. The fourth, Damian had just sealed with help from his fire team and they were now advancing at breakneck speed to the nearest breach in their outer defense. The emergency flashing red battle lights provided a slow strobe effect and made the scene they raced through all the more eerie and surrealistic. The klaxon continued to blare in their ears as they raced through the narrow corridors. Suddenly two groups moving at high speed in opposite directions slammed into each other in the narrow confines of a connecting landing.

Damian, running at full tilt with his BM-59 at high port arms, had less than a microsecond to recognize the threat that suddenly flashed in front of him. His first reaction was to high-stick the onrushing intruder, slamming the forward stock of his rifle between his left hand and the magazine solidly into the face of the invading street soldier. It was a move that would have made any National Hockey League fan proud! The thug looked like he had hit a solid clothesline and his feet suddenly flipped up into the air as he back spun into the ground. Damian side stepped the next gutter rat and solidly drove the heavy walnut butt of his rifle into the chest of the following intruder crushing bone and tissue in a gasping precordial thump that stopped the invaders heart instantly. He barely blocked the muzzle of the rifle that was jabbed at his face and went off just inches from his head. He slashed the fore end of his own rifle down it into the shooters head ripping open the side of his face and destroying his right eye in the process. Damian's right foot flashed out and caught the intruder solidly in the family jewels and he finished off the bent over vermin with a solid bone shattering butt stroke to the back of his head.

As quickly as it had started, it was over. One of his own was down, but they had cleared the corridor of five invaders. Damian checked his weapon and motioned for the fire team to continue their sweep through the stronghold. Now moving cautiously and with heavy malice, they cleared each section and then moved to

the next. Coordinating by radio each team supported the next as they methodically cleared the buildings from the top down through each level of the Castle. Midway through the battle Damian had his troops fix bayonets and advance with cold steel in the lead. The vermin they faced had no stomach for this form of vicious close assault that the well-trained castle defenders presented. Nor could they hide for very long with thirty caliber rounds blasting through any walls they attempted to hide behind. Each team of defenders worked as a well-oiled and well-rehearsed team, their movements choreographed through relentless hours of practice under the discerning eye of Old Man Jacobson. Damian realized now why the old man had insisted on such continuous and rigorous training. His respect for the old warrior had just moved up a couple of dozen notches.

The battle teams pressed on relentlessly forcing the invading vermin back out of each section until the situation became obvious even to the most glue huffing, brain fried member of the invading cockroaches what the final outcome would be. Losing their nerve and stomach for the fight, they finally broke and ran, streaming out of the lower levels through the break in the protecting wall of the gardens, destroying much of the gardens in their mad dash to survive.

Damian leaned against the outer wall of the gardens, totally exhausted, and slowly slid down the rough brick and concrete rubble wall to sit there in the soft dirt where he finally allowed himself a brief moment of rest. The sun was breaking over the once proud city and filling the concrete canyons and roof tops with the new days light. They had survived the first major assault against their new home. It could take weeks, perhaps even months, before all the damage that had occurred this night could be repaired. He looked up to the rooftop of the buildings that made up their stronghold and spotted one of their snipers combing the surrounding buildings for any evidence of the scum that had carried out the raid. Every few minutes a shot would ring out and find its mark.

They had tried to live at peace with the other survivors of the decaying city by consciously avoided confrontation at every corner. They were all trapped in the same situation, locked into a constant battle to survive. Yet the fact that somehow he and his group had managed to restore some dignity to their lives should not be the reason that they would find themselves at war with the other citizens of this once proud city. There had to be a way out of this dilemma, because if they couldn't find one, Damian knew that now they would have to take the fight to the enemy if they expected to survive, and that would mean taking on anyone and everyone outside the walls of their compound. There had to be another way. There just had to be. His mind drifted as the first rays of morning warmed his exhausted body. There had to be a way...

Kevin and Buck just stared dumbfounded at the three dead troopers, their eyes

blinking in amazement. Then Kevin locked eyes with his wife and he was there by her side in two or three large steps. He pulled her close to him and reached out to his girls.

“Are you three alright?” He asked in a hushed panic.

Stephanie wrapped her arms around her bear of a husband and buried her face into his chest.

“I don’t think we’ll ever be alright again.” She said as her eyes filled with tears.

Samantha and Amanda joined their mother in a group hug of their father and the four just stood there for several seconds. Buck was the first to realize that the old lady that ran the store was still standing behind the sales counter in mild shock, her mouth hanging open and eyes staring straight ahead. He quickly walked around the counter and, putting his right arm around her, led her by the hand, carefully walked her over to sit down in one of the well-padded chairs by the dressing rooms. He then returned to the scene of the carnage and proceeded to strip the three dead soldiers of anything of value that they had on them.

Kevin looked down to see his son pulling off the gear and rifling through the dead soldiers pockets. “BUCK! Just what in the hell are you doing?” he started to roar.

Buck paused and looked up at his father. “I’m getting anything that could be important for us to survive.” He said matter-of-factly.

“Those bastards deserved to die.”

All heads turned towards the voice that had just spoken. It was the little old lady, the store clerk that Buck had helped find a seat.

“They’ve been part of the bunch that has been killin’ and terrorizing this town for months!” She said with venom in her voice. She slowly rose out of her chair and walked over to the phone and picked it up and quickly dialed a familiar number.

“Dillon, this is Maggie. Got me a mess in the store that needs cleanin’ up. Yep. Well can you drop by and give me a hand. Uh huh, yes, uh huh. Oh about ten maybe fifteen minutes I expect. No, not for I’d say another hour or two. Ok, see ya when you get here.” She hung up the phone. “That was my son. He’ll be here in just a few minutes to help me clean up this.” She motioned to the three dead soldiers bleeding out on her floor. “You folks had better make yourself mighty scarce if you know what’s good for you.”

“What are you going to do?” Stephanie asked between sobs.

“Oh don’t you worry about me none little missy. Ol’ Maggie is mountain born and

breed and this ain't the first time I've seen men die." She scratched her head and looked at Samantha. "I just had never seen a young lady like yours pull any of that Kung Fu..."

"Shotokan Karate." corrected Amanda. "My sister is a brown belt in Shotokan Karate."

"Well what ever you call it, I ain't never seen anyone drop three gorillas like that in less than the blink of an eye. Though it couldn't have happened to any more deserving punks than those three."

"Well, Mrs..." Kevin began.

"You call me Maggie young man. I've buried two husbands and my days of being a Mrs. Anybody are long over. Maggie will be fine."

She reached below the counter and came up with several large trash bags. "Now, if you wouldn't mind bagging those boys so they don't bleed all over my fine hardwood floor after you've stripped them, I'd appreciate it."

Less than a hour later, with the gear from the soldiers loaded up under the wood in the trailer and the three bodies headed off in Dillon's truck, the Jorgenson's pulled up in front of the Richardson's place. Maggie had led the way in her old beaten up Chevy truck, taking back streets and alleys (gravel and dirt roads in the mountains) in an effort to keep them off the main avenues routinely patrolled by the security troopers. Mrs. Richardson met them at the door and ushered them quickly inside as she kept a wary eye.

The group followed Maggie into the cozy living room and introductions were passed around. Mrs. Richardson recalled Kevin and Buck from the store and was happy to finally met Kevin's wife and daughters.

"I'm sorry Frank can't come down, but he's not doing so good since they burned down the store around him."

Maggie leaned forward. "Betty, maybe you ought to have Stephanie here take a look at Frank. She's a nurse."

Betty's eyes lit up. "Oh, that would be too much for me to intrude upon you, we just having met and all."

"No, not all. Buck, would you mind running out to the Jeep and grabbing my medical kit?" Stephanie turned to Betty. "Point the way, Mrs. Richardson."

"Please, Betty."

“Then Betty it is. Let’s go check on your husband.” And the pair disappeared up the stairs.

In the mean time Maggie filled Kevin, Buck and the girls in on the down turn of events since the last time they had been to town three months ago. It seemed that a group of thugs had cruised into town shortly after the Jorgenson’s last visit. They ran roughshod over the town’s people and were finally driven out by the Homeland Security Forces that answered their call for help. But soon it became apparent that they had traded one brand of tyranny for that of an even worse sort. The town’s folk hailed the arrival of the Security Forces as saviors of the community. They were welcomed with open arms and at first things seemed to be headed back to normal. Then the main body pulled out to put out other fires across the region and left a rear guard to ensure that no more goons would attempt to move in after the majority of the Guardsmen had departed. It was this rear guard that then began to take advantage of their position in a wicked way and soon the town’s folks found themselves under their yoke with no way out. Those three that had gone on to meet their makers were not the worst of the bunch, Maggie assured them. There were several others whose special brand of cruelty was several grades above the trio they had put down this morning.

Stephanie came down the stairs alone and motioned for her husband to follow her out to the porch. The air was warming up and it was going to be a fine day outside. That was until Steph told her husband the news.

“He’s been burned badly and wounded as well, but the worst of it is that it looks like he’s got a massive infection brewing.”

“Gangrene?” Kevin asked.

“Not yet, as far as I can tell. But there are forms of it that don’t give off that characteristic odor.” She shook her head. “But I don’t know hon.”

“Is there anything you can do to pull him through?”

Maggie shook her head. “If I had the right equipment and antibiotics, I might be able to do something, but even then I don’t know that I could pull him through. It would take some pretty heroic measures to even give him a fighting chance.”

“Well, you tell me what you need, and we’ll figure out the rest. We’ve got to do something, Steph. If it wasn’t for his kindness and charity when we first came here we might not have survived the winter.”

She closed her eyes and stood there silently. A sign he knew was her way of organizing her thoughts, putting everything in order and focusing her energy before she began a project. She shook her head, opened her eyes and was out

the gate...the race was on. The pair went back in and Stephanie laid out the plan of attack. Soon Maggie and Stephanie were pulling out of the driveway followed by Kevin in the Richardson's pickup. Buck was to stay behind and provide security while Amanda assisted her mother and Betty as they made preparations for the battle to save Betty's husband.

Malcolm assumed the air of the defeated and shuffled along with the other prisoners as they made their way across the hard packed exercise yard to the chow hall. Yet his mind was far from defeated. His senses were fully alert and active. He had memorized every movement of every guard that came within his sight. He was soon able to recognize each one at distance by their particular walk or the manner in which they carried themselves. Somewhere there was a chink in the wall and he would find it.

After the first several weeks he had gave up conversing with the rest of the prisoners in his barracks and refused to become involved with their evening academic discussions. They were a bunch of old dusty blowhards more willing to engage in intellectual conversation than real action. He soon realized that they had no stomach for the kind of resistance he was planning, as they were perfectly satisfied with discussing or reading about history, rather than becoming a part of it. His physical exercises conducted in the late evening and early morning hours became more rigorous and demanding as he felt his body becoming harder with each passing day. He could now do over three hundred pushups and a like number of sit-ups without stopping. Not bad for someone over fifty years old. He practiced yoga and Tai Chi to improve his flexibility, strength and balance. The years of sedentary life were finally slowly flaking away...soon he would be ready.

Malcolm knew that it would only be a matter of time before his keepers would become complacent in their watch over the domesticated subjects that surrounded him. There had been no real escape attempts that he had heard of. Oh, sure, a few idiots that had tried to climb over the chain link and barbed wire fence, but they only provided mild sport for the guards before they became bored with the game and finished them off. No, for the most part the inmates in this prison were nothing more than the sheep their masters had created. Attuned to believing that they were free, when in fact they had been dancing to the tunes played by the real rulers of this country for their entire lives. It was these shadow like overseers that never truly set foot amid the muck and mire of the masses of civilization on this world that were pulling the strings. They were the Stratos-dwellers, literally a separate race of the ruling class that remained above the din of humanity. It was these bastards that Malcolm planned to make war upon. But first he had to get free.

A little less than an hour later, the two pickups raced up the gravel driveway and began unloading the supplies Steph had requested. By dinnertime Mr. Richardson's bedroom had been cleared of all furniture except his bed and was beginning to resemble a hospital wardroom. Stephanie had her husband line the walls and ceiling with painters plastic drop cloths using double-sided carpet tape to hold them to the walls and good ol' duct tape to seal the seams. Next, he created an inner room that reminded him of a big tent. His wife had him seal every seam with duct tape. He even sealed the tent across the bed and Frank's chest. She wanted an airtight bubble around the damaged areas on his lower body into which she had Kevin direct a tube from the oxygen tank he had snatched from the welding shop in town.

Maggie had managed to get into the small clinic in town with the janitors key she borrowed, and with Samantha's help they quickly acquired the needed medical supplies and drugs her mother had requested. When Sam asked why they just didn't take Frank to the clinic in the first place, Maggie informed her that the idiot Guardsmen had killed the only physician in town shortly after the main body departed because he refused to provide them the drugs that they demanded. They had torn up the clinic trying to find the controlled medicines that had never been there in the first place. Then, they moved on to the pharmacy in town where they had better luck after seriously wounding one of the pharmacy assistants. For the last month, that was the way things had been going. Some of town's folk had managed to slip out past the road blocks and made their escape but many had no where else to go and so they simply kept a low profile locked into their homes hoping that invaders would soon get bored and drift away.

Stephanie had Kevin construct the oxygen tent around her patient in order to create an oxygen-enriched atmosphere that would be inhospitable to the particular organisms that she was now fighting. She carefully allowed the tank to slowly feed the confined space a tiny trickle of O₂ to reduce any chance of fire and O₂ poisoning of her patient. That was the reason his upper body was secured outside the O₂ enclosure. She meticulously debrided the three gunshot wounds and the necrotic tissue on the burns. By applying wet to dry dressings across the large leg burns Stephanie hoped to peel away the rotting tissue and finally get down to the healthy tissue underneath. She was pumping a powerful combination of intravenous antibiotics around the clock in to every living cell of Frank Richardson's body and still she wasn't sure that going to be enough, of if she had enough to continue this treatment for very long. But it was all she had.

By the second day of their stay at the Richardson's, Stephanie was feeling as if she was going to be forced to perform an amputation to save the old mans life. The infection had permeated deeper into the tissue layers of the left lower leg than she had originally thought and could very soon be advancing along the capsular spaces in a condition know as compartment syndrome. If that were to

happen she would be extremely hard pressed to save his leg and keep him alive. There was already a serious risk of the infection going systemic and knocking him right out of the game. The hours ticked by slowly.

Besides the bedside vigil that Stephanie and the girls kept, Kevin and Buck focused their attention on protecting the ongoing efforts inside by becoming intimately familiar with the Richardson's property. The house sat in the middle of twenty semi-wooded acres up a gravel road several miles outside of the town. Kevin pulled up every bit of his past Ranger and 10th Mountain training that he could remember and with his son they began to devise a contingency plan should events prove it necessary.

The little word that Maggie managed to get back to them was that the local garrison was going door-to-door looking for their errant troopers. For now they were concentrating in the immediate vicinity of the village itself, probably figuring the trio had gone off and gotten drunk and were sleeping it off in one of the abandoned homes or had possibly taken up with one of the local ladies that was providing entertainment for the three. This was not the first time troopers had taken off for short periods of time or altogether, and Kevin hoped that they would soon lose interest and abandon the search. At the same time he was not going to trust to fate that they would quit before they reached the Richardson's place. Faced with this threat, his first choice would be to abandon their current position and retreat back into the mountains. However, that was not possible due to Frank's fragile condition. So the next effort would be to make it as difficult as possible to reach the property and, if it finally came down to a fight, to take out as many of the troopers that remained before they reached the house.

Kevin had originally thought that he only had the two .30-30's and a couple of boxes of shells that he and Buck had brought with them into town along with the three M-4's and the six or seven thirty-round magazines that each dead troopers had carried. As he laid the equipment out on the kitchen table and inventoried the war material that they had to work with, he was lamenting to his son how limited a defense they would be able to put up with just what they had at hand. Betty was doing the dishes in the sink and turned around to watch the pair as they inspected and laid out the weapons.

"Well if it's more gear like that that you need, I guess it would be alright to take you down to the bunker."

The pair at the table suddenly looked up at their host. "The bunker?" they said in unison.

Betty laid down the plate she was drying and motioned for them to follow. The trio descended into basement and walked to the back corner where she kept her canned goods. She motioned for Kevin to grab the center rack of shelves and Betty reached in and tripped the hidden lock.

“Now be careful you don’t pull too hard.” Betty said.

The huge cabinet pulled out to reveal a large concrete door hidden behind it. Again Betty tripped another hidden lock and the concrete door pushed in. It was so well balanced that Kevin couldn’t believe the ease with which it swung back.

“Took my Frank a little bit to get the balance just right.” she told them and then beckoned them to follow her into the short tunnel. Twenty or so feet later they came to another blast door, though this one actually looked like a door. Kevin followed her directions and turned the large wheeled handle and pushed in the steel reinforced door.

“Frank built this place for us right after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Things were pretty scary back then, I can tell you.” She went on to explain all the features that Frank had added over the years.

The first room was a narrow corridor with showerheads on both sides of the wall. This was the decontamination room. Lockers were on both sides of the wall the first few and last few feet for the stowage of gear and clothing. A small drying room lay just beyond. Through a lighter weight blast door lay a small anteroom that looked to have mix of different types of radio equipment and a small computer crammed into a built in office center.

“That’s the communication desk there. Frank used to do a lot of HAM radio back in the day. There’s some more modern equipment there also, but most of it is old Heath Kit stuff that he built himself. He was pretty good with the solder gun in his day.” she added proudly.

The communication room opened into the living room and though it was cramped by modern standards it would more than accommodate a families needs should the time arrive. Betty pointed out the restroom facilities, kitchen, food storage rooms and then the sleeping accommodations. Again, cramped, but more than adequate. After completing that portion of the tour the small group arrived back at the communication desk. Betty pulled out a couple books and then tripped another of Frank’s hidden latches and the bookshelf popped away from the wall.

“I think this will be of more interest for you boys.” She grinned and led the pair into another series of rooms.

As soon as Kevin stepped inside he recognized the all too familiar odor of machine and gun oil. This was testosterone paradise. The first room was full of tools, all neatly arranged and ready to put to work. There appeared to be a combination of wood and metal working machines laid out in an extremely efficient manner, not an inch was wasted. Frank had stuffed an array of tabletop machines: a drill press, a 10-inch table saw, planer, jointer, and wood lathe along

one wall. Against another wall a nice little combination mill/lathe, another drill press, and a couple of machines that he didn't recognize but knew that they somehow dealt with metalworking. There were welders both arc and gas under one of the workbenches. The upper walls were filled with swing out cabinets that just screamed tools. The third wall was filled with bins and storage shelves full of bolts, screws and all sorts of fasteners. A virtual hardware store crammed into one wall. That last wall was divided by a bookshelf. The benches on either side seemed to be devoted to electrical and electronic building and repair. Betty led them through the door hidden behind the bookshelf into the next adjoining room. How many more such hidden rooms Frank had, Kevin could only begin to guess. This was the gunroom, totally dedicated to the maintenance, building and repairing of weapons. Kevin was instantly drawn to the weapons crates that filled one whole wall. Reading the stencils on the old military crates nearly made his heart skip a beat. If the labels were accurate then here were at least two crates each of M1 Garands, M1 Carbines, G-1's (FN FAL), WWII era Mausers and Enfields, Swedish Mausers, SKS and AK's and more. There appeared to be an assortment crates containing de-milled weapons as well. Some he had never even heard of. He wondered what the initials STEN stood for? Oh well, if he could get even half of these weapons working they could arm a small army. Kevin felt like a kid at Christmas. Then Betty showed them the walk in gun safe and the reloading room.

"Betty, your Frank was one hell of a survivalist!" Kevin exclaimed as he looked over a collection of arms that would make anyone swoon.

"I always figured he'd grow out of it after things began to cool down, especially after the wall collapsed back in '90 or was it '91, but he insisted that it was better to keep this going and never need it than to need it and not have it."

Kevin just nodded in agreement.

"I just let him have his hobby. It kept him home and busy."

"I'll say!" Buck commented. "This must have taken all his spare time!"

"Well, at first it did, but over the years he would putter around down here just a couple of times a month. He called it his blood pressure medicine." She paused and looked around. "Who would have ever thought that we'd really be needing all of this stuff someday"? She shook her head slowly. "It certainly has become a crazy world out there."

"That it has Betty, that it has." Kevin said as he looked around the room. Now he had the tools he needed to wage war.

The possibility of having to remove Frank's leg weighed heavily on her thoughts as Stephanie preformed the last dressing change of the day. She carefully

removed the wet to dry dressings she was using as a form of wound debridement. Soaked in a special sterile solution, they were put on the wound where they would dry and adhere to the necrotic or dead tissue. When stripped away during a dressing change, they peeled off taking the dead tissue with the dressing. This is not a pleasant procedure for the patient, to be sure. But one that was vital in the battle against a spreading infection. His temperature had remained relatively high but steady, hovering between 102 and 103 degrees. Stephanie pulled off the last layer of gauze dressing and for the first time was greeted by healthy tissue underneath the gray necrotic waste that came away with the gauze. The bullet wounds were also showing the first signs of beginning to granulate in healthy tissue finally and their drainage was also becoming clear for the first time.

Franks temperature finally broke early the next morning and by daybreak he had come back to the world of the living. He was not out of danger to be sure. It would take many weeks for the slow process of healing to complete its task, but for now he had cleared the first hurdle. He kissed his wife softly from what had almost been his dead bed and kissed the hand of his nurse and physician.

Damian walked through the aftermath of the night's carnage. The cost was heavy on the small community that made up the Fourteenth Street Retreat, the name that they called themselves. Ten of their number had perished and three times that had been seriously injured or wounded. Hardly anyone walked away from that night unscarred. Momma Chin had fallen in the battle, taking on a squad of gangsters that attempted to invade her families flat. Blocking the doorway with her stout rotund form she wielded her large Chinese cleaver with deadly accuracy and hacked down the first three thugs that broke through the door. Even after she had been wounded several times she stood her ground with the tenacity of a mother Grizzly protecting her young and with her dying breath carved huge gashes in her attackers flesh. The testimony to the ferocity of her final stand was the pile of stone cold street vermin stopped dead just inside the doorway. Her vicious last stand afforded her husband the crucial seconds necessary to retrieve the family's shotgun and clear the remaining rabble from the doorway and the connecting passageway as well with a steady stream of double ought buckshot. But for all his effort he had arrived too late to save his wife. He now sat next to her shrouded form in the courtyard sobbing relentlessly. Damian paused and placed his hand on the old man's shoulder. The old Chinaman looked up and, with his bloodshot eyes, silently thanked the young warlord and then returned to his grieving.

Damian continued his survey of the damage and vowed that he would make the stronghold impregnable if he had to lay every stone himself. Plans and ideas started to spin through his weary brain and he moved with a renewed strength and purpose. If it was war they wanted then he would give them war!

Pax Americana Chapter 43- The Intolerable Acts

When all government ...in little as in great things... shall be drawn to Washington as the center of all power; it will render powerless the checks provided of one government on another, and will become as venal and oppressive as the government from which we separated.”

Thomas Jefferson, 1821

“Today, we need a nation of Minutemen, citizens who are not only prepared to take arms, but citizens who regard the preservation of freedom as the basic purpose of their daily life and who are willing to consciously work and sacrifice for that freedom.”

John F. Kennedy

Janice, the secretary for the Director of Homeland Security, glanced up at the young, rail thin, bespeckled civil servant standing quietly waiting his turn in the Directors office. The Director had been in a seriously foul mood all morning and everyone summoned before him today was receiving their fair share of the meat grinder treatment. She thought that the poor guy in front of her didn't have much of an ass to chew on and he already looked like he had been through the grinder at least once this morning. Simpson stood quietly, his knees shaking slightly as he waited outside the Director door. He did not wish to be the deliverer of bad tidings and he knew this information was not going to be well received. Twenty minutes later the Director looked up from the portfolio Simpson had just delivered to him. The look on his face was not good.

“WHAT IN THE SAM HELL ARE YOU TELLING ME, SIMPSON!” The Director bellowed. “How in the FUCK did you lose my Secretary of Transportation. Would you like to tell me that?”

He threw the papers and photographs across his desk hitting Simpson in the chest and sending them flying all around him.

“How in the HELL did you manage to let him out of your sight WITHOUT AN ARMED ESCORT!”

“Sir...Sir, I didn't, ah, he ah, he ah...just took off without...ah...really telling any one where he was going.”

“HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING?”

“Well ah, Sir, just – ah, just that he, ah, was, ah going to do some inspections, ah Sir. That's all.” Simpson backed away from the Directors desk as he bent to pick

up the scattered papers.

“So your boss goes off...BY – HIM – SELF.....AND YOU JUST LET HIM!”

“Well, ah ah Sir , ah Mister Director, we had, ah um no idea that he was headed up to Pennsylvania.....Sir?”

“So where is my Secretary of Transportation, Stempson?”

“Ah that’s Simpson, Sir-“

“YOUR NAME WILL BE SHITHEAD IF YOU DON’T GIVE ME A STRAIGHT ANSWER!”

“We’re not sure, well we think, but um ah um their trying to test, but we don’t know yet.”

“Don’t know what yet....SHITHEAD.”

“Ah Sir, well the body was pretty badly damaged in the fire. Er, ah, we may not be able to confirm a DNA....”

“Was that his vehicle that you found or not?!”

Simpson stood up with an arm full of papers and hung his head as he did so. “It was Secretary Davis’ vehicle and,” he paused. “We believe the remains found at the scene were those of Mr. Davis.... But ah er um after all his SUV was hit with an anti-tank rocket and....”

The Director slammed his fist down onto his desktop.

“There will be hell to pay for this...hell to pay – do you hear me? If you and all those pencil necked geeks around here were just half the man that Brentwood Davis was, then I’ve have something to work with. Instead you BASTARDS just hide behind your desks while YOUR BOSS is out in the field making sure the job gets done right!”

The Director kicked back his chair and started to pace in front of his window. Simpson just stood there numb. He had liked Brentwood, his boss had been a professional and friendly man to work for, very efficient and exacting but fair. Though since he had survived that ambush a few months back he had begun to act a little strange. Nothing too unusual for the normal run of the mill people that worked inside the beltway, but strange none the less. But now there wasn’t even enough of his charred remains to put in a box to send home.

The Director turned and starred at Simpson.

“Are you still fucking here?”

Simpson backed quickly towards the door, fumbled with the handle and nearly fell backwards out into the outer office. He turned and dropped the entire pile of papers and photographs on the secretary’s desk. Janice looked up quite provoked.

“He’ll probably want to look as these later.” He said to her as he back peddled through the outer door into the passageway and away from this office.

The truck bounced through some more heavy ruts and Brentwood banged his head into the solid metal bed of the truck again. He was nearly frozen despite the cold weather gear and the sleeping bag that he was stuffed into. It seemed like days had passed that since he began his trip to freedom hidden in the secret compartment built into the big trucks bed. He watched the blacktop spin past the tiny peep hole that also provided his only access to fresh air and his only relief should that become necessary. Beyond that he was merely cargo being smuggled north.

The truck had changed drivers several times. Passed through too many checkpoints to count and even changed loads twice. But it never wavered in the general direction it was traveling. The last several hours had been rather brutal as the truck was now clearly out in the country and crossing over rougher and rougher roads. Despite the jostling Davis drifted off to sleep again.

When he awoke the truck was stopped. He quietly pulled forward and looked out the peephole and could see dirt and gravel beneath the truck. They were stopped, for how long he didn’t know. His heart started to pound as he heard voices approaching. Suddenly there was someone beneath the truck working the hidden latch mechanism. Brentwood pulled his gear in front of his face in the narrow rectangular box and tried to look like stowed gear. The trapdoor hatch dropped open in front of him and a head poked up through the opening.

“Mr. Davis....Mr. Davis, would you like to join us out here or are you planning on staying aboard for the return trip south?”

Davis peeked over the duffle bag. He had no desire to return south. Colonel Melton had insisted that he take this journey to “safety”, though Davis wasn’t sure if it was for his benefit or that of the Colonel’s. Melton had all the information that he could have asked for in his campaign against the oppressive government that now sat in Washington. Whether the Colonel fully trusted that information and the provider was another thing. Either way, Davis thought, he was out of it now.

He crawled out of the sleeping bag and over the rest of his gear. He dropped head first onto the gravel road beneath the truck and crawled over to the side where he attempted to stand up for the first time in several days. His knees were a bit shaky and he pulled himself up against the side of the truck.

He was somewhere out in the sticks to be sure. The air was clean and crisp with the smell of water nearby. But just where he was he had no clue. A motley group of what appeared to be Patriot soldiers, woodsmen, and hunters were earnestly engaged with unloading the crates off the back of the truck. He recognized the face that had just invited him out of the metal box that he had laid in these past several days. He tried to make out the features of the people around him but the bright light after so many days in the semi-dark box caused him to squint and shut his eyes against the glare.

Mickey Davis was the first to step up to Brentwood and offer him his hand.

“Welcome aboard Mr. Davis. I understand you come highly recommended from our patriot brethren down in the Keystone State.”

Davis looked around once more as he shook hands.

“Just where am I?” he asked.

“Just our little piece of heaven, Mr. Davis, here in the Upper Peninsula.”

“Michigan?”

“Welcome to the Spartan Militia, Mr. Davis.”

As each day passed, Frank Richardson's condition slowly improved. The vast dosage of IV antibiotics that Stephanie had pumped through his system around the clock had done their job and allowed his own immune system to slowly but surely begin to fulfill its role as primary protector of the body. But he was still a long way from full recovery. Stephanie was very worried about the residual scarring that would be left by the widespread burns to his legs and lower back. Her patient needed extensive skin grafting that simply was not available under the current situation. She poured through the pile of books that Betty had 'borrowed' from the medical clinic and the small village library. As a senior member of the 'Friends of the Community Library' she used her access to the now closed public building and, with the help of the boys (Kevin and Buck), gathered up every medical and alternative healing book she could find. Applying every ounce of nursing experience and her vast array of alternative healing knowledge, Stephanie concocted salves and creams she could apply to the tortured skin as it slowly regenerated. She was trying to keep that scared tissue

as elastic and supple as possible. It would be a very long road to recovery, but Mr. Richardson would eventually recover, and she was putting every ounce of her skill and knowledge to work to achieving that goal.

Kevin, Buck and the girls were hard at work down in the bunker. The local Homeland Security Forces had not ventured out beyond the immediate limits of the village in their search for the tardy troopers, but Kevin felt that it would only be a matter of time. While he would much rather be back out on the homestead where he had time and distance separating them from the vultures here in town, until Mr. Richardson could safely make the journey, they would be forced to hole up here on his property.

Kevin was extremely impressed with the underground bunker that Frank had constructed over the years. There were enough commodities for their entire little band to remain secluded from the topside world for several months easily. To that end, he and the kids began to give the hide away a thorough cleansing from top to bottom, inventorying all the stored expendables and making ready the complex for occupation. There was an itch in the back of Kevin's mind that really bothered him and he wanted to insure that they would be ready at the drop of a hat to occupy the hidden living quarters.

In addition to the hospitality preparations that were primarily being carried out by his daughters in the bunker, much to their teenage whining and complaining, he and Buck spent the majority of the daylight hours preparing the Richardson's twenty acres to be as inhospitable as possible to outside aggression.

While the fire had heavily damaged the Richardson's outdoor store, between the basement storeroom that Frank had hidden out in and the storage sheds on the property itself the pair gathered up every trap, snare and tripwire they could find and set about building a rather nasty barrier around the property. They moved their vehicles up to the back corner of the property and heavily camouflaged them there. There was an old goat trail that snaked around back along the ridge and offered a tight but passable escape route should that prove necessary. He was sure that he could get the CJ through the course, but Betty and Franks' pickup would be a tight squeeze. Still, it was better than advancing through hostile territory controlled by overwhelming numbers. He made preparations for that eventuality as well.

"Mr. President," The Director for Homeland Security began. "The current situation has escalated beyond that of the immediate emergency. You must take action now, Sir, to ensure the very survival of this nation."

The heads around the table bobbed up and down in agreement.

"You've all read the reports. Between the millions of our citizens that have died as a direct result of the plague, we are now completely certain that we have been directly attacked with a plant virus as well. From our best estimates we have lost at least eighty percent of our farm production capabilities in the grain belt. Some of the far western states seem to have been spared from this plant attack, but they cannot sustain the remaining population's food needs, Sir."

"What do you propose, Mr. Director?"

"Well, Sir, this is the time for firm action if we are to save our great nation." The Homeland Security Director paused and looked about the table. The next few seconds, he felt, would determine if his country would survive this onslaught.

"Drastic times call for drastic actions, Sir."

"Yes?"

"I and..." he looked again at the assembled leaders of the Presidential Cabinet. "the majority of the Cabinet feel it is time to evoke the full power of the PATRIOT Act and all of the Presidential Executive Orders pertaining to the current situation... Sir."

The President slowly looked around the large walnut table and received nods from the vast majority of his cabinet.

"To what end are you gentlemen suggesting I extend the current powers of the Presidency?"

"Sir, to begin with..." The Director paused again. "In order to preserve this nation, we must immediately suspend the Constitution and the Bill of Rights." He let that hang in the air for a moment. "Until such time that we can adequately insure the safety and well being of every citizen and regain control of the situation."

"But we already have a state of emergency and martial law nation wide, what more do we need?" The President asked as he leaned forward.

"Sir, we must suspend the rights of the individuals to insure the survival of the state. If we don't take immediate action in this effort we will lose this nation to disease, starvation and anarchy. You already know of the troubles we are having within the decimated cities hit hardest by the plague. Weapon confiscations have ground to a halt due to these damn civilian militias and white supremacist groups that have taken up arms against their own citizens, police and military forces. I have just lost my Secretary of Transportation to a vicious attack while he was out inspecting the emergency food transportation system and routes. Sir, we are under attack from both within and without!"

Heads bobbed up and down and the room was filled with murmurs of agreement around the table.

“I have, as of this morning, recalled all merchant ships under command of U.S. Merchant Marine Captains. All exports are temporarily on hold, especially grain and food shipments.” The President commented.

More heads bobbed in agreement.

“That is not enough Mr. President. It is more than just recalling our merchant ships. We must mobilize the entire country towards this effort. We must put the people in the fields...”

“Are you talking conscription?” The President asked seriously.

“Sir, we must feed our own first! The present levels of food reserves will not last the winter and you can rest assured that we will receive no outside help from the rest of the damned world.”

The President looked down the great table to his Secretary of Agriculture.

“What happened to our grain reserves, Bob?”

“Er, ah, well Mr. President, we have sent a considerable amount to several African Nations during the last crisis there, not to mention the grain sales to China after their last disastrous flood season. And then there’s the ongoing grain exports to Russia that your predecessor established.”

“Do you mean to tell me that we’ve depleted our own reserves to the point that we can’t feed our own people?”

“Well , er, aah no Sir, we can feed our people, but you have to understand the various international agreements that we’re bound to....”

“FUCK THE INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS, BOB!” The color was rising in the President’s face. “Can we or can we not...feed our own people!”

The Agriculture Secretary pulled nervously at his collar. “Well, ah Mr. President...with the ah...um current reserves on hand...we can um...ah probably feed the nation for maybe the next three to four months.....possibly stretching it to six months if we severely restrict distribution.”

“Severely restrict the distribution...how so Bob?”

“Minimum survival rations....I ah, have the figures here Mr. President...” He shuffled through the stack of papers beside him.

“MINIMUM SURVIVAL RATIONS! Do you gentlemen realize what will happen if we restrict this country to minimum survival rations?”

“Sir...Mr. President...” The Homeland Security Director interrupted. “Sir, we must initiate your full Emergency Powers and the full power of the PATRIOT Act, if you even hope to maintain order and steer us through these dark times. The procedures are already established, Mr. President...you just need to say the word and we can begin to bring this nation out from these desperate hours.”

The president looked into the face of every cabinet member. When he was done he leaned back in his chair and rubbed his eyes. “Gentlemen, I reluctantly agree that this desperate hour calls for desperate measures. But are you certain that it has come to this?”

He slowly rose to his feet and looked once more about the room.

“Gentlemen, have the appropriate papers on my desk by tomorrow morning. General, place the military on full alert, from this moment on Posse Comitatus is fully suspended. Gentlemen I pray you are right about your assessment of our situation. IF you are correct...this action today will save our great nation and we shall all be heroes. IF on the other hand you are wrong...” He let those words float about the room for a few seconds. “Then we will face the undoing of our nation because I fear the people will not tolerate our actions.”

The room became deathly silent.

“Mr. President, when the people are hungry and starving, it will be to their government that they will turn for their salvation. They won't be worrying about a piece of paper written over two hundred years ago, they will be demanding food and security and that we will give to them. And you, Sir, will be considered their savior, the man that brought them out of this hour of darkness.”

“I pray and hope you are right.” With that the President walked with a heavy heart from the room. “I hope you are right.” He said as he left the room.

The Director for Homeland Security turned to the General sitting beside him. “Now we can clean up this decrepit country and put things on the right track once and for all...don't you think, General?”

The grizzly old war veteran turned slowly to look at the bureaucrat that sat beside him. “You better pray that your summation of the situation is correct, Mr. Director, or they'll pin your name up there beside Benedict Arnold in the history books.”

“We'll write the history books General, and 'they' will believe what we tell them to believe.” The Director answered and then rose to leave. “We've been tolerant for

far too long with the seditious rabble that has been trying to bring down this great nation. It's time we dealt with them once and for all."

And with that he left the Cabinet room.

The General watched him leave and mumbled to himself. "Yeah that was tried once before by a swarthy little corporal with a funny mustache..."

The General walked over and picked up the direct line to the Pentagon War Room.

"Hello Larry...get the boys together by the time I get there. The shit is about to hit the fan."

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 44 – The Proclamation

"Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficent...The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well meaning but without understanding."

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis

"Good intentions will always be pleaded for every assumption of authority. It is hardly too strong to say that the Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions. There are men in all ages who mean to govern well, but they mean to govern. They promise to be good masters, but they mean to be masters."

Daniel Webster

[W]hat country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time that [the] people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms...The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

Thomas Jefferson, letter to Col. William S. Smith, 1787

Samantha burst into the underground workshop as Kevin and Buck were putting the finishing touches on the latest batch of rifles they had reassembled from parts.

"DAD, BUCK, you've got to get up stairs and hear this NOW!"

The pair looked at each other and instantly went for their battle gear and rifles.

"NO, WE'RE NOT UNDER ATTACK! IT'S THE RADIO! The President is talking on the radio and Mom sent me down here to get you ASAP!"

Buck set the gear down and made for the communications bench in the outer room.

"What station?" He asked as he flipped on the receiver and started to spin across the channels trying to locate one that was active. Suddenly a voice they all recognized came out of the speakers. The trio stepped back to listen.

"...so, my fellow Americans, due to the circumstances that I have just outlined I am forced to take the following actions to preserve this great nation of ours. Rest assured that as soon as this crisis is over and we are once again safe and secure I will return the reins of representative leadership back to the Congress and the good people of this country."

So by the power vested in me and under emergency executive orders I am suspending all non-essential operations and restrictions of this government for the duration of the ongoing crisis. As such, all Congressional members are to return to their states where their leadership is needed back on the home front seeing to the immediate welfare of their constituents.”

Stephanie, Amanda, and Betty joined the three in the bunker’s radio room.

“All Police, Sheriff, Marshals, Medical, Fire, Emergency and Rescue services are now federalized and report directly to the office of the Director of Homeland Security.

All shipping, commerce, air and ground transportation assets are hereby federalized and will report directly to the Secretary of Transportation, office of Homeland Security.

Any acts of sedition against this government or any representative of this government will be treated as high crimes of treason against the state and will be dealt with sternly and swiftly by appointed regional military tribunals.

The private ownership of all firearms is now strictly forbidden. All personal weapons must be turned into local law enforcement agencies within forty-eight hours. There are no exceptions to this mandate. Possession of any firearm by private citizens after this deadline will be considered an act of treason and adjudicated according to federal laws by the appointed regional military tribunals.

The hoarding of food and all essential commodities is now strictly forbidden. No American household may have in their possession greater than one-week’s supply of food and essential commodities on hand for their immediate family. All excess must be turned over to your local FEMA Redistribution Officer.

All citizens will report to your local FEMA offices for registration and work verification and/or assignments beginning in three days at eight a.m. Compliance by all U.S. citizens is mandatory.

All foreign visitors, resident aliens, and illegal aliens are to leave this country within the next forty-eight hours or face immediate imprisonment at hard labor until their expulsion from this country can be effected. There will be no waivers or visitation extensions authorized.

To this end all citizens of the United States of America must have in their possession, at all times, the National Identification Card that will begin issue within the week. Failure to provide identification to any federal employee upon demand will result in immediate imprisonment for not less than sixty days at hard labor and up to one year for the first violation.

The armed forces of the United States will now assume the full responsibility for the security of our national borders. Any attempt to violate the sanctity of our sovereign borders will be dealt with swiftly and soundly.

Homeland Security Forces will be responsible for the security of all major transportation routes within this county and will be further responsible for...."

Kevin flipped off the radio and looked about the room.

"What does all this mean, Pop?" Buck asked.

Kevin put his hand on his son's shoulder and let out a long breath.

"It means, son... that we now live in a totalitarian state." He looked up at his daughters, his wife and their new friend. "And we are now subjects without the rule of law or our God given rights."

"But Dad, what about the Constitution... the Bill of Rights, what happened to all that?" Amanda asked.

"Well, if I just heard what I think I heard, everything that has been a right in this country for over two hundred years just got flushed down the toilet."

Samantha looked unbelieving at her father. "But, but... but they can't just do that! It's against the law, it's against the all the laws! Isn't it?"

"Yes, dear, it is, but they've done anyway." Stephanie said in disbelief.

"But, Kevin." Betty began. "How is this possible? How can the President just do away with all our rights? How can he do that?"

Kevin shook his head slowly and leaned back against the wall.

"They've been doing it for a long time, bit by little bit, by little bit. We've been duped into believing that it was all for our own good, but this is what they've wanted all along. Total control. They were just waiting for something like this current situation to push the people over the edge and now they have it."

"Come on, Kevin, I can't believe our government has been planning for this. It's just too incredible!" Betty exclaimed.

"Well then, Betty, you tell me how they can have National ID cards for the ENTIRE NATION ready in less than one weeks time? How can FEMA be ready in three days to register all Americans and give them their work assignments? Hell, they can't manage to get to a natural disaster in three days time. Yet there it

is! How could the President possibly have written all those executive orders and coordinated everything that is going down? No, Betty, somebody... they, them, whomever... has been planning this for a very, very long time."

The room was deadly silent.

"I rest my case." With that Kevin began to turn back to the work he had left in the armory.

"Now what?" Stephanie looked at her husband questioningly.

"Now we get ready for a very long and very nasty time of it." He disappeared into the armory.

Buck joined his father and began to wipe down the battle rifle they had just completed. "How bad do you think it's going to get, Pop?"

Kevin let out another long sigh. "That all depends on how many Americans are still patriots in their heart, Buck."

"What will we do?"

Kevin looked up at his son and looked him squarely in the eye. He loved Buck in that special way that only a father can feel about his son. He didn't want to think about the road that lay ahead for them. He had prayed that this day would never come, but it had and now they had to deal with it."

"Son...we're Americans....and, as Americans, we have only one choice." He turned and placed both of his massive hands on the shoulders of his not so small fourteen-year-old son. Looking deep into those green eyes that he got from his mother, Kevin said the only thing that he could say. "We fight!"

Brentwood Davis sat on the examination table naked except for the traditional open backed paper-thin gown that victims of medical examinations are forced to wear. These torturous garments were probably used to keep patients from bolting out the door at the prospect of being poked and probed in very uncomfortable places. Already he felt like he had submitted nearly half his blood, urine and other...stuff, to the various tech's that paraded into and out of the examination room. He was becoming a little nervous over these procedures as each medical tech was fully protected by a respirator and bio-suit. He was beginning to feel very contagious.

The room he waited impatiently in was extremely stark and antiseptic. The waiting wouldn't be so bad if he could at least browse through an old issue of

Modern Homemaking, National Geographic, or something, but no such distraction was available. There was a light knock on the door, and then the door opened a crack.

A voice from the other side of the door seemed to be giving orders.

"I need those results back on room two right away, room three is ready for quarantine and have security escort room seven back to the bridge *after* Mickey administers the medications I've prescribed."

A solid looking middle-aged man stepped into Brentwood's room.

"Hello, Mr. Davis." He offered a gloved hand. "I'm Doctor Anders and I'll be conducting your physical examination this afternoon."

"Say Doc, do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"No, go right ahead, what's on your mind, Mr. Davis?"

"Well first off, please, just call me Brentwood, or Brent would also be fine."

Doctor Anders nodded.

"Ah...well....um, what's with all the precaution. You're the first person I've seen in here that's not in a full bio-suit and even you're wearing a surgical mask?"

"Well Mr. Davis...ah excuse me, I mean Brent. You've hit the nail right on the head. This clinic is a screening facility and precaution is our top priority here."

"What are you protecting the patients from?"

Dr. Anders chuckled. "It's the other way around Brent. We're protecting ourselves from the patients. Our job is to see to it that both those of us working here and the rest of the population out here on the peninsula are protected from anything you might be bringing in."

"Anything I might bring in?" Brentwood felt a little offended with the doctor's last comment.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll check out just fine, Mr. Davis...er...Brent, but we've stopped a lot of diseased and contaminated refugees from spreading their afflictions into our zone of control."

"Surely not that many? Why, this isn't some third world country where...."

"Oh you would be surprised, very surprised." Dr. Anders started to set up his

examination equipment and began explaining the current situation over his shoulder as he did so. "We've got a few minutes here before I've got to get on with this exam so let me explain a few things to you."

"While it's true that the U.S. was a leader in sanitation practices, we've always been just sitting on the edge of a disaster. Every time we have a major national disaster, earthquake, flood, hurricane or what ever, what is the first thing you hear about sanitation?" Anders looked at Brent.

"Boil your water?"

"Exactly, boil your water." Anders turned around with an oto-ophthalmoscope and began the examination as he talked.

"We've seen amebiasis here, you know it as amoebic dysentery or just dysentery, giardia, cholera, malaria, hepatitis, typhoid fever, hemorrhagic fever, tuberculosis, typhus..."

"GOOD GOD, Doc, have we been attacked with all that?"

"No, no, no. That's just the garbage that is always waiting around in the wings when the normal preventive measures break down. Like in a major disaster or, in our case, a war."

"So all this precaution is to treat those afflicted with those diseases?"

"I wish we could treat them all." Anders sighed. "No, Brent, this is to keep those afflicted individuals out of and away from our zone of control. It's not an easy thing to do, but we have no other choice."

"And if I don't pass muster?"

"Certain individuals we make exceptions for. We'll clean you up if it's necessary, that is, if we need your knowledge or professional skills. The rest..."

"Escorted across the bridge?"

"Yes. I'm afraid so."

"And if they try to sneak back in?"

"I'm afraid the...ah...treatment for unauthorized entry is rather Draconian. We don't have many folks attempting to reenter without permission."

Two hours later Brentwood felt like he had been through the ringer. He'd had physical examinations before. They usually lasted no more than fifteen minutes.

This physical was the most thorough he had ever experienced or heard of. He was sure that there was not a hair on this body or a millimeter of skin that had not been gone over...TWICE! He had been listened to, pounded on, poked, probed, stuck with needles and violated in more than a dozen ways.

"Well, Brent, I think it's pretty safe to say that providing your labs come back OK, you're ready for the next step."

"And that would be? Geeze, Doc you probably know my body better than I do! You couldn't have missed anything if I had it!"

"The next step is a two week quarantine period."

"TWO WEEKS IN QUARANTINE?"

"Yes, two weeks strict quarantine, but believe me you'll be busy. If you pass that you'll be moved up to the intermediate level and finally into the general population."

"Are all these precautions REALLY necessary Doc?"

"Brent, I was in Chicago when it got hit with the Plague. I have no desire to go through that again and neither do the rest of the folks up here. Believe me, it's totally necessary."

Jamal carefully peaked out between the shattered timbers to get a view of the work going on around the Castle. He had to be especially careful since the failed attempt to overrun the stone fortress three weeks ago. Now the people of the Castle hunted the scavengers that scampered across the ruins. Their zone of control seemed to be expanding daily. Deadly snipers watched from concealed perches and dropped anyone that even attempted to look in their direction. Where before the inhabitants of the Castle were happy to live and let live, they now simply killed anyone that dared to be found within rifle range.

Jamal now watched through the lens of a stargazing telescope the construction that had been taking place over the last three weeks, and it was impressive. From somewhere the Castle inhabitants seemed to come up with an endless supply of materials that was, each and every day, making it more impossible for any attacker to even reach the outside walls of the fortress. All of the windows from the first through to the fourth floors were now bricked up nearly solid. Where metal shutters had been on the windows of the upper two floors there was now nothing left except a narrow vertical slit in the bricks and concrete that filled every window. The road and sidewalks in front of every building and over where they had crashed the truck through the garden wall were now implanted in large

concrete teeth interlaced with strands of barbed wire and interwoven around a porcupine of embedded pipes and iron that angled out towards the attacker. They would never be able to simply ram the wall again and any attempt at a frontal assault against the defenses now in place would be sheer suicide.

Damian surveyed the finishing touches on the southern flank of the castle. Even he was impressed with the lethal maze of barbed wire and obstacles that awaited anyone attempting to force their way across the no man's land they had created. The first layer was a series of barbed wire tangle foot strung from just inches off the blacktop up to two feet above the ground. By varying the height and angle they had made it impossible to go under, through or over the wire. Concrete dragon's teeth combined with a steeply angled shallow ditch that would drop the nose of any vehicle into the solid earth would prevent a repeat of the last attack. The garden wall was reinforced, thicker and now another five feet higher. The ground before it bristled with an angry array of metal punji sticks that made it virtually impossible to walk through. As they rebuilt the wall Old Man Jacobson had Damian add a few surprises for the next attempt against their sanctuary. Some very deadly surprises to be sure.

Damian stood in the roof top garden tended by his grandfather and looked out over the once proud city as the sun was slowly fading behind the western skyline of buildings. If only there was a way for all the survivors to work together instead of constantly fighting over the few remaining scraps he thought to himself. There had to be a way.

Stephanie walked up and placed her arm around her husband as he stood on the Richardson's porch and watched the last rays of the sun descend below the horizon.

"Hon." She began. "How bad do you think it will get?"

He placed his arm around his diminutive wife and pulled her closer to him.

"I don't know dear. But I don't think it's going to be easy for a very long time."

"Do you think we'll have to fight? I mean, us and the kids, do you think that we will really have to fight?"

He didn't answer for several minutes. Taking in a deep breath, he cleared his thoughts and answered her. "I don't see how we can avoid it, Steph. This is not an issue that can be left for others to take care of. This is something that if we, each and every one of us, don't step forward now, we may never again be able to control our own lives. What the President is doing is wrong, I know that to the

core of my very being.”

“But the children, Kevin, we may lose the children.”

“If we don’t get involved we *will* lose the children and our grand children as well.” He turned to face her. “Just look at the mess this country’s gotten into over the past few months with just the Homeland Security Forces running amuck. Now imagine every single agency of our government pulling the same thing.”

“But he said that after this crisis is over, things will go back to normal.”

“That would be nice to believe, except that governments never give up *anything*, Steph, and you know that.”

“But maybe, just maybe...”

“There are no more maybes, hon. They’ve crossed the Rubicon and either we fight for our freedoms now, while we still can, or we surrender to servitude and slavery for a very, very long time.”

“Is there no other way out of this?”

“Not that I can see.”

They both stood there quietly watching the light fade over the ridgeline.

Stephanie looked up at her husband. “So what is our next step?”

“How soon can Mr. Richardson travel?”

“Not for a while yet. He’s still not entirely out of danger. Maybe in a couple of weeks, why?”

“Then it’s time we go underground.” He thought for a few seconds. “Hmmm, and we need to get a hold of Maggie and see just who will stand with us. Maybe, just maybe if we strike first.....”

Scavengers crept cautiously through the ruined buildings. The small group scampered quickly across the open spaces and disappeared into the dark shadows to slowly reemerge further down the night shrouded wall. The leader froze and reached out every sense casting about for any hint of danger. The last two groups that had ventured into this section of the town had not come back. The gang was hungry, they were starving and this was the last known reservoir of food in this section of the city. Stronger rival gangs controlled the other nearby

sections, but they no longer tolerated any outsiders venturing into their territory. Ever since the failed assault on the Castle life had become especially hard. Suddenly nowhere was safe, not even on home turf. Somehow the Castle was striking back and it was striking back with deadly lethal accuracy.

Silent eyes watched the group advance. Slowly one by one they moved closer to the center of the kill zone. Like rats knowing that the cat is nearby they warily advanced, their hunger driving them on harder than their caution. A muffled sound broke the hush of half taken breaths when their leader and point man was suddenly jerked to the ground. His body convulsed and spasmed as his dying brain tried to comprehend the wooden shaft that had just pierced its protective shell.

The night was suddenly filled with the sound of crashing metal ringing in from every direction. The scavengers broke in a mad panic, each fleeing to save themselves with no thought of the others with them. But they didn't get far as they slammed face first in to walls that hadn't been there a few seconds before. Openings and exits became suddenly filled with metal bars and grates. They were trapped! The alley they had been crossing through was now their prison. Hearts pounded in anticipation. They each looked for someone, something, anything to strike back at, but all that greeted them was silence.

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 45 – Against the Wall

"For target shooting, that's okay. Get a license and go to the range. For defense of the home, that's why we have police departments."

James Brady

"Are we at last brought to such humiliating and debasing degradation, that we cannot be trusted with arms for our defense?"

Patrick Henry

"The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government."

Thomas Jefferson

"Work crew going out through the wire today."

That was the scuttlebutt that was being whispered through the barracks! The word was that prisoners were going to be assigned to a work detail that was scheduled to perform some sort of community work project for the next several days. Malcolm didn't want to get his hopes up. If, somehow, his name was on that list, it would be the first time since he had arrived at the relocation camp and been incarcerated over three months ago that he would have an opportunity to breathe free air. It would also be the first opportunity he would have to escape. Immediately following breakfast, during morning formation the selection began. Malcolm waited impatiently hoping that his name would be included on that list. The announcement proceeded slowly. He strained to hear the prison guard's voice. They were almost there.

"A. Daniels, M. Danielson, E. Davidson..." M. Danielson THAT WAS IT! He made the roster.

One by one the men filed slowly forward. When the list was finally complete the non-selected detainees were marched off and those whose names had been called stood patiently for the next step of the process to take place. A burly over fed sergeant and an equally indulgent corporal walked along and inspected their prospects for the day. Once the sergeant was satisfied with the individual selected the corporal tossed the "volunteer" a bright yellow jumpsuit.

"Strip and put this on!" The corporal repeated in a dull monotonic rhythm.

The baggy canvas bundle hit Malcolm in the face, but he didn't utter a single word. He just peeled off his dull orange camp coveralls and quickly pulled on the yellow jumpsuit in the chill morning air. He didn't want anyone to notice that

where academic flab had resided when he arrived, in the short time that he had been imprisoned behind the barbed wire and electrified fencing a much harder and improved form had taken its place. It took several minutes for the selected work crew to complete the change over and then to reassume "the position", a sloppy version of military parade rest. It was then that the officer leading this foray into the outer world dropped the bombshell.

"All right, you derelicts!" He began. "We've got a little community clean up for you over educated leeches to perform. But just so that you don't get any ideas that escape is possible we've got a little incentive plan."

The officer marched slowly up and down the line of prisoners eyeing each one.

"First off, we are in the middle of nowhere. Even if you should manage to escape the immediate area and avoid the guards, dogs and *everything else*," he paused for effect, "You would die in the wilderness that surrounds you. Second, your uniforms have micro transponders sewn into them, so as you can well imagine, you can't go anywhere that we won't know about. And third...we will hang the men you leave behind. After all they are guilty of high treason because they didn't stop you and by doing so assisted your escape. So I suggest that if you wish to survive this little outing you better make sure that you keep an eye on each other. "

"Is there any one, ANY ONE, that does not understand what I just said?"

He looked up and down the line. "Good! Now get loaded up in those trucks, you've got a full days work ahead of you!"

Malcolm concentrated on taking several long slow breaths in an attempt to calm his pulse and steady his nervous energy.

Six big military trucks stood waiting for the 'volunteers' but Malcolm noticed that only the middle three were being loaded with prisoners. The first and last trucks had their canvas covers off and heavily armed guards were already loaded in the back following their every move with M16's and shotguns at the ready. He noticed several kennel crates were also loaded on each truck as well. With the number of guards and dogs present Malcolm realized that any attempt to escape was going to be extremely difficult, perhaps even suicidal....but if he saw an opportunity, his mind was already made up. The problem was how to get away from both the guards and his fellow prisoners.

The convoy lurched forward and slowly started to roll towards the gates. Malcolm tried not to look nervous but rather attempted to assume the dull moronic lassitude of the rest of the prisoners around him, it was not an easy thing to do. He wasn't sure who he hated worst, the men that had imprisoned him, the men that kept in a prisoner or the fellow prisoners that fully accepted their fate and by

doing so complied and gave legitimacy to the current situation.

Kevin awoke at the crack of dawn as he had ever since his days of military service. That was probably why it never bothered him to be up at the crack of dawn and on the job site first thing in the morning. He started the coffee and prepared to make the morning rounds to see that everything was in order as it should be. With his forty-five on his hip, the FN FAL G-1 he had taken a liking to, slung over his shoulder and a hot cup of fresh coffee in hand he casually strolled the inner perimeter of the Richardson's property. Without giving away the location of the various surprises that he and Buck had prepared, he noted the condition of the area and checked the trip wires at a distance.

Kevin always enjoyed this time of the morning, when the new day was just beginning, before the grit of the world dirtied the crispness of the fresh new born day. With that done, he returned to the house and went down into the dungeon, his term of endearment for the underground armory, to begin the work for the day. If all went well he could finish cleaning up the parts on the lathe and clean off the cut out receivers to begin assembling the STEN Submachine guns. Old Frank had picked up a couple of crates of demilitarized STEN's and enough steel tubing to turn the whole shebang into kits and pick up a real nice profit on them. But one thing lead to another and he never got around to dealing with the parts so there they sat for many years until Kevin and Buck discovered them under stacks of "Cruffler" rifles and other gun parts. Kevin decided to see if he could put together a half dozen or so after he discovered a book on the subject in Frank's extensive survival library along with the template for the receiver.

It was just after ten in the morning when Buck popped his head into the armory just as Kevin was finishing up the tack welds on the last two receivers.

"Pop, Maggie's here with some friends, Mom says you need to come on up and join the meeting."

Kevin lifted up his visor and turned off the welder. "Meeting? What meeting?"

"Didn't you ask for Maggie to round up anyone interested in standing with us?"

"Well...yes, but I didn't think they'd be here all that quick." Kevin laid down the welding rod and helmet and began to pull off the leather apron. "Tell Mom and Maggie I'll be right up."

The living room was packed with people as Kevin joined the group. He recognized a few faces but most of the people there were new to him. It was hard to miss Maggie in the center of things, trying to usher everyone in and organize the rabble that seemed to keep filing into the room. There was no way, Kevin

thought, that they were going to get anything accomplished if they were all packed in here like sardines in a can.

Kevin stepped into the gaggle and using all of his six foot four stature and back forty voice got their attention.

“FOLKS, this room is just not big enough for all of us. If you wouldn’t mind filing back out the front door we can move around to the back where we can hold this meeting and have enough air to breath at the same time.”

A few chuckles were heard and slowly like the tide going out the room emptied. Kevin took the back way out of the house and grabbed his son by the arm and spoke softly into his ear.

“Buck you grab the binoculars and get up on the roof. You’ll still be able to hear what’s going on but I want you to keep a eye out on the area immediately around us and in the direction of town.” He paused. “Just in case.”

“Aww, Dad, I don’t want to....”

Kevin gave him THE LOOK.

“OoooKay.” Buck knew better than to whine when his father gave THE LOOK.

“Son, I’m counting on you to keep a sharp eye out for us. This is not a game! Our very lives could rest upon you. Now get up on that roof and keep a sharp watch.” He slapped his son on the backside and sent him on his way.

The crowd had moved around to the rear of the house. Maggie was playing mother hen and getting everyone situated as Kevin arrived. He counted nearly twenty-five folks and still more were just arriving as they began taking up positions around the patio, sitting on benches, hay bales and the few chairs the Richardson’s had out there.

“OK FOLKS, OK, it’s time to settle down so we can get this meeting started.” Maggie began. “Tyler, if you wouldn’t mind, we’d like to get started. Thank you.” She coughed and began. “Now I’m not much for public speaking so I’ll make this brief. You folks know my mind and you know that I don’t take to be told what to do much.”

There were chuckles around the group. They obviously knew Maggie well.

“Well...I heard the President’s speech last night and....I just couldn’t believe my ears. It’s bad enough the things we’ve had to deal with in the past few months and all. Especially with those Homeland Security bastards that have taken over our town.” She paused to let that sink in. “But we’ve got to draw the line

somewhere and this is where I draw it.”

She turned and pulled Kevin into the center of the group next to her.

“This here young man is Kevin Jorgenson. You remember those folks that got stranded here when all hell broke loose last summer. Well, he and his family have a little place back up in the Buckhorn, fine set of kids and a great wife. Stephanie, she’s the one that has been nursing Frank back from the dead. It was the Jorgenson’s that took care of those three bastard Homeland coyotes that have been preying on the village.”

Several heads suddenly turned to inspect Kevin, which made him feel a little bit nervous. The fewer people that knew about that event, he felt, the better. Oh well, so much for that idea.

Maggie continued “So here’s the situation, folks, we can do one of two things. We can do what the President wants and roll over and play dead and just swallow everything that we’re ordered to do like good little citizens. Giving up our freedom for their form of security AND WE’VE ALREADY SEEN THAT! Or.....we can tell them to go pound sand up their ass.”

More chuckles and a few whoops and a couple of “Go get ’em, Maggie!” came back from the group.

“Now cut that out.” She actually blushed. “OK, I’ve said my piece, but the real reason that I dragged you folks up here was to meet Kevin and hear what he has to say. I think he’s got the situation pegged solid. We’ve talked and it makes good sense to me. The folks around here have been grumbling about doing something since this whole mess started and now...well just hear what he has to say.” With that Maggie stepped back and left Kevin in the spotlight alone.

Kevin looked around nervously and cleared his throat, he hated public speaking. “*Well, here goes.*” he thought.

“I’d like to begin by thanking all of you for showing up here today on such short notice. I guess Maggie can be pretty persuasive.” Light chuckles erupted for a few seconds from the gathering. “I wasn’t planning on doing any speaking today, but....well I guess the situation demands that we get used to doing things we’ve never done before.”

Heads were nodding in agreement around him.

“I’m not a politician, or much of anything, really. Before all this went down I was just a heavy equipment operator for the county water district back in Pennsylvania. We were out here checking on some property that we bought to someday retire on. Thanks to Frank and Betty taking us under their wing last fall,

we made it through the winter in pretty good shape, what with everything going on at the time. But now we've got a different problem facing us."

He saw that he had their attention and continued. "I've never really given much thought to politics or what really went on back there in Washington until recently. I did some serious reading over the winter, had plenty of time since there was no TV to dull our minds when we were snowed in up there...and well....quite frankly I don't like what we're being asked to put up with."

"And what do you expect us to do about it?" Someone from the gathering asked.

"Well that depends on whether you consider yourself a free citizen or a servant to the government." Kevin answered. "That depends on whether you think that the government of this country is supposed to be of the people, by the people and for the people. That depends on whether you trust someone you've never met, who doesn't know you, who doesn't feel any obligation to you, to look out for your best interest. I'm not talking about me. I don't expect you to listen to me. But what about those folks that you've elected to be your representatives back in D.C.? Have you seen any evidence of their concern lately? Who is looking out for you and yours here right now? Who can you count on folks? Someone living high on the hog over two thousand miles east of here? Or your friends and neighbors right here, right next to you. My wife and children came out here for a vacation, to perhaps build a place that someday we could retire to. It was part of our dream, part of our American dream. But now circumstances have placed us here as a part of your community. But how can this be a community when how we live is being dictated to us from the other side of the country? Are you going to stand by while someone who has never missed a meal or a paycheck in his entire life is going to march into your pantry and tell you how much food you can have there? Are you going to stand by while the federal government placed its brand on each us with a required National Identification Card? How about your children? Are you going to stand by as the federal government tells you when and where you can work? It's not like they are asking us....they are telling us. When they take away our guns tomorrow who's going to be protecting us from the goons that are protecting us right now?"

"I'm not giving up a single bullet to anyone....that is unless I'm sending one down range at some SOB trying to take my gun!" Yelled a grizzly ol' desert rat on the right followed with several "You tell 'em, Vern!"

"That's my point ladies and gentlemen. We've got to draw the line somewhere, and now is that time! The President has suspended the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, He does not have that power. He has sent home the Congress, OUR DIRECT REPRESENTATIVES, and is requiring us to register for work conscription, forcing a National Identification card on us and EVEN TELLING US HOW MUCH FOOD WE CAN HAVE IN OUR HOMES! He does not have that power! Then to make sure that we can't complain he is removing the very tools

that we need to protect our freedoms! IF we give in now, IF we obey this proclamation as we have been told we must, that act of obedience will be an act of treason! It will be treason against everything that our forefathers set down and many good men and women have died for, for over two hundred years. IF we comply with this unconstitutional and illegal directive, then we will be reduced to nothing more than sheep waiting to be led to the slaughter!”

The group suddenly erupted with angry shouts and support. Kevin had hit a nerve and hit it hard.

The five-ton trucks bounced along the road for well over an hour. The prisoners huddled together trying to conserve the slightest amount of body heat. Malcolm could see bits and pieces of scenery from time to time out of the corner of his eye as the back cover flapped in the wind. The terrain looked sparse and barren, desert like. He tried to imagine just how far they could have driven in the couple of days they were on the bus to the camp.

Thirty minutes later the trucks finally rolled to a stop. The sun was bright and Malcolm had to squint to make out the town they stopped in. The place reminded him of one of those apocalyptic “B” rated Hollywood movies. The town appeared to be entirely dead, not a soul in sight other than the yellow clad prisoners and the cammied guards.

The one thing that caught Malcolm’s attention almost immediately was that the guards were wearing their chemical protectant masks and full biological hazard suits. Every single one of them! This did not make him feel very good about the current situation. Then to make it even worse the prisoners found out exactly what their jobs were to be. They were the clean up crew for this dead town. Their job was to remove all the dead bodies from where ever they found them and pile them in the center of the streets to be burned like so much cordwood. In teams that consisted of four prisoners and a single armed guard they began their methodic morbid search of every building. Many of the victims of the plague had died in their beds. The scene encountered again and again as they cleared each house was brutally etched in the minds of every prisoner. Malcolm was even more determined to find away out of this nightmare.

It was well into the afternoon when the second reason for this work detail came to light. During the final swept of a house that yielded an entire family of plague victims, Malcolm leaned against the wall near a downstairs window. It was bad enough dealing with dead adults, but the children really got to him. That was when he overheard the two guards talking. Their voices were difficult to make out as they had to nearly yell through the masks to be heard by each other, but Malcolm could hear well enough.

“So have any of yours shown any signs yet?”

“Not yet, yours?”

“Maybe one or two, too early yet to really tell for sure.”

“I don’t know why they have us doing this. They should just burn the whole place down.”

“But then how would they know if the vaccines worked?”

“Besides, as long as they don’t know their being used as guinea pigs, who cares, they’re just fucking prisoners, traitors and crooks. Who gives a shit about them?”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. Well, we better go get the next fire going. Man, they don’t pay me enough for this shit!”

“Fuck, man, aren’t you grabbing a little bonus from these houses?” The one guard showed the other a satchel bag full of jewelry and watches.

“Yeah but if you get caught, then you’ll really end up on the inside with these poor fuckers!”

“Who do you think turned me on to this deal? The Captain himself! Look, most of these bastards will be dead in three days time, sweet, no witnesses. And it’s not like anyone’s going to come here and claim any of this shit. Man, get a clue!”

Malcolm had heard enough. If he was going to die it wasn’t going to be by some insidious unseen bug that slowly filled his lungs up with fluid until it choked the life out of him.

“Those FUCKING BASTARDS!” he muttered to himself. Then in a flash of inspiration he knew what he was going to do.

“KEVIN, THE SECURITY FORCES ARE ON THE MOVE!” Betty called from the back door.

The crowd suddenly got very quiet.

“HOW MANY?” Kevin yelled back.

“MONA SAYS THEY’VE GOT A COUPLE OF BIG TRUCKS AND TWO OF THOSE BIG JEEPS WITH GUNS ON TOP!”

“SHIT! ARE YOU SURE THEY’RE COMING THIS WAY?”

“SO FAR IT LOOKS LIKE IT!”

“HOW LONG UNTIL THEY GET HERE?”

“THEY’RE NOT MOVING VERY FAST BUT THEY’VE JUST PASSED THE SUPER MARKET.”

Kevin turned back to the crowd. “Well ladies and gentlemen you’ve got less than five minutes to make up your mind which side of the line you’re standing on.”

For a few seconds nobody moved or spoke. Then Vern, the desert rat that had spoken earlier got up and began moving towards his truck.

“They want my gun....FUCK ’EM, let ’em come and get it!”

With that the group seemed to move as one. Out of trunks and from behind seats and even pulled brazenly from easy rider rifle racks displayed out in the open in a couple of truck back windows came a menagerie of high powered hunting rifles. Within seconds they were back to the man (and women) armed and ready for bear. Kevin looked at perhaps the most motley crew of citizen soldiers that had ever been assembled. Their ages ranged from twelve years old holding a twenty-two rifle to over eighty and hefting an old battle hardened M1 Garand. The calibers of the weapons may be different, the skill levels varied, but the one thing that Kevin was sure of was that they could hit their target, and that was all that mattered.

Samantha suddenly materialized beside him and handed Kevin his FN FAL G1 and his web gear. The Free Citizens Mountain Militia was born.

Eight houses later Malcolm found what he was looking for. While the guards had apparently swept the houses clear of any obvious weapons, gun racks and cases along with much of anything that had any value that they could stuff in the haversacks they all carried. It was only a matter of time before Malcolm would find something they missed. An old Ruger twenty-two target pistol. It was one of those that looked like a smaller version of the World War Two German Luger. Malcolm dropped the magazine out and found it was full. He had found it stuffed back under the mattress. It wasn’t much, but it would do the job, especially up close.

Malcolm had been noticing as the day wore on that some of the prisoners seemed more haggard than others. A few were coughing and had begun to sweat more so than should be expected from the work they were performing. He

knew that he had to get away and soon if there was to be any chance of his survival. Two houses later he spotted his opportunity and made his move.

He had procured a leather belt at the house he discovered the pistol in and had uncomfortably strapped the gun around his waist under the baggy coveralls. By carefully moving about it didn't show from the outside. It was in the garage that he was checking that he got the idea. Grabbing an empty liter soda bottle and a roll of duct tape he fashioned his plan.

"BOSS!" Malcolm called his team's guard. "BOSS WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO HERE?"

The Security guard walked into the garage and looked at Malcolm.

"What the fuck do you want?"

"Well, looks like this person committed suicide in the car, do you want us to bust him out of there and burn him or leave him alone?"

A garden hose was stuck into the tailpipe of the car and then run into the back window that was rolled almost closed and then taped up. All the doors on the vehicle were locked. The guard walked over and peered into the window of the car.

"The Captain wants them all burned, so we....."

The two dull pops were barely audible even in the garage. The guard dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes. Malcolm had been careful to tag the guard in the side of the head so as not to damage the gas mask. Malcolm quickly began to strip the guard's mask off and then his cammies. Though the guard was a few inches shorter than Malcolm they were close enough in size that he was sure that he would pass all but the closest scrutiny until he could get out of the immediate area. He worked feverishly in near panic to exchange clothing. The uniform was a near fit, a little tight in the waist and almost too short but workable. The surprising thing was that the combat boots were actually a size or two too large. Malcolm quickly borrowed the guard's socks and pulled them over his own to help make up the difference and then laced the boots as tight as he could get them. It would have to do for now. He threw on his flak vest and web gear and grabbed the guard's M-16. He was just about to leave when he went back and grabbed the Ruger. It took just a few seconds to pull off the duct tape that held on the soda bottle, its bottom now blown out, and he stuffed the pistol quickly into the cargo pocket of his cammie trousers. Now to get away. He edged towards the side door of the garage and cautiously looked out.

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 46 – Grass Roots

“Before a revolution can take place, the population must lose faith in both the police and the courts.”

Robert A. Heinlein

"You'll see how truly Bothan I am, Councilor Fey'lya. As power flows are warped and twisted, just remember it is you who made me remember, and made me live up to my heritage."

Asyr (Isards Revenge)

"Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect every one who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined."

Patrick Henry, speech of June 5 1788

The battle had been raging furiously hot and heavy for less than an hour between the Homeland Security Forces and the just formed Free Citizens Mountain Militia. It was a fanatical contest between the paramilitary trained government troops and the free citizens of that small mountain community. Neither had ever been tested in battle and, except for the small scattering of aging combat veterans from past wars, this was their first test in the real heat of conflict.

Where the arrogant security troopers had expected placid submission to their presence, they found defiant vengeance and ferocious tenacity. The Militia would not be moved. The Security Forces suddenly found themselves on the receiving end of a deadly chainsaw of extremely accurate high-powered rifle fire. Where the troopers had attempted at every opportunity to avoid their mandatory biannual weapons qualification secessions, the citizens standing their ground this day honed their high-powered skills several times a month in order to reliably put food on the table. The amount, or lack of, training was immediately evident to all.

Kevin drew upon all his prior military experience as he dashed from hasty fighting position to hasty fighting position directing the Free Citizens in their desperate struggle. Vern still lay out in the driveway exposed and bleeding out on the rough gravel. There was nothing that anyone could do for him under the constant barrage of automatic fire coming from the troopers as they blindly sprayed the buildings and vehicles with 5.56 rounds. He thought it a miracle that so few of his own people had been hit or wounded thus far in the battle. He didn't think the Federal boys however were doing as well. So far the militia riflemen had managed to keep any gunner off the heavier fifty caliber machine guns and perhaps even damaged them sufficiently to render them inoperable.

This was turning into a battle of open sighted M-16's in the hands of

inexperienced and poorly trained troops against men and women that had hunted as a way of life and their scoped large bore lever and bolt-action rifles in whose hands these few defiant free citizens could place a round in the black at over four hundred yards...every time! Huddled down behind the solid stone walls of the Robinson house and outbuildings, behind impromptu barricades and sand bagged fighting positions that Kevin and Buck had prepared just days before, they patiently drew forth their long guns and waited for their enemy to offer them a target. They didn't have to wait very long. The Troopers were out gunned, if not in numbers (which were dwindling rapidly with each returned round from the sniping Militiamen and women), definitely in skill and accuracy.

The first Humvee had pulled broadside off the driveway and was now riddled with bullet holes. The 5-ton truck that had followed it through the gate was pulled over to the opposite side of the gravel driveway and was literally surrounded with the bodies of dead and wounded troopers that attempted to simply march up to the gathering of civilians and bully them as they had many times before. Vern, the old war vet and dried up desert rat had defiantly stood his ground in the middle of the driveway when ordered to immediately disarm himself and surrender. His answer to the officer with the bullhorn was to spit on the ground and flip him off. The Homeland Security officer ordered him a second time and Vern simply stood there, his rifle at port arms. Kevin didn't see where the first shot came from and it didn't matter now. The fact that it narrowly missed Vern and blasted out the windshield of the truck behind him was all it took. With practiced ease born of decades of experience, Vern brought up his old well worn scoped Winchester 30-06 and surgically placed a high velocity 30-caliber hole in the center of the security officer's forehead less than seventy five yards away. The battle was on.

The gaggle of troopers marching up toward the house let loose a flurry of high-powered glorified twenty-two rounds towards Vern catching him several times and dropping him to one knee. Struggling he jerked back the action, expelled the spent round and brought the big gun back into battery. This time, however, knowing that he was fading fast, he just aimed in the general direction of the advancing troopers and let fly another round before he keeled over onto the rough gravel. He saw one of the leading troopers jerk viciously backwards under the impact of that powerful round just before he closed his eyes.

"Take that, you bastard." He mumbled as he slowly drifted off into unconsciousness.

That defiant image burned itself into Kevin's mind as he immediately took command of the Militia and began the defense. He commenced yelling orders above the din of fire as he brought the big FN around and felt it buck under the punch of each slug as it ripped downrange on its mission to shred both bone and flesh. He danced the muzzle across the front of the advancing troopers and quickly thumped out a wall of hot metal that broke the advance. His fellow citizens promptly joined in the fight and sent several volleys of pinpoint death

screaming into the shocked and retreating soldiers and swiftly cleared that immediate threat from view.

To Kevin's amazement, the only casualty in this first exchange on their side had been Vern. A few seconds of silence descended upon both sides as they began to realize what had just taken place. It was at this moment that Kevin became conscious that his daughter was standing right beside him and had engaged the troopers just as he had, without thinking and with a vengeance.

"Sam, get the hell inside and get your mother, sister, Betty, and Frank down into that bunker!" He ordered!

Sam just looked up at him with a strange confused look on her face.

"GO!" He yelled.

She blinked and suddenly realized where she was and what she had just been ordered to do. She didn't say a word, didn't acknowledge her father, just hunkered down and ran at top speed towards the back door, her M-16 at port arms, her eye on the enemy line.

"She's a real trooper!" He thought with pride and sadness at the same time.

Kevin watched her disappear into the house and then realized his own exposed position. Dropping to one knee behind the short stone wall, he began the defense. The free citizens now fully realized that the debate was over, there was no time left for fence sitting, they were in a fight for their lives and their freedoms and to that end they looked to their new commander who suddenly seemed to be everywhere at once. He spread them out and sent them off towards the different prepared positions. The house was the stronghold, the center of their defense but they could be easily trapped there if they allowed the federal troopers the option of maneuver, which was something that Kevin certainly did not wish to do. To that end he and Buck had created a series of fighting positions that flanked the house and spread out their defensive lines.

The troopers had momentarily retreated back beyond the perimeter of trees outside the fence lines of the Robinson's property to regroup. With the Captain's sudden demise, it took several minutes for their Lieutenant to realize that one: he was now in charge; and two: they had stepped into a bag of seriously pissed off bobcats. Nearly a quarter of the troops that he had arrived with were either dead or seriously wounded and out of action, all in less than five minutes. There was no back up immediately available, at least not for many hours and again...he was in charge. He stood there unsure of which direction to move, either forward into the battle or retreat. His hesitation at this critical juncture of the battle was all the time Kevin's people needed to take up their positions.

The Lieutenant's second mistake was to think that sheer firepower alone could carry the day. When he finally regained his military composure he took the remaining Hummer and attempted to force the center of the defensive line. Maneuvering the transportation vehicle as if it were an armored vehicle, he ordered it to creep forward pounding the house with deadly fifty-caliber rounds in a rolling assault. A squad of troopers huddled behind the gun vehicle in anticipation of reaching the house and breaking through the civilian battle line.

Greg Noland carefully placed the crosshairs just above the fifty's flash and let fly a 225 grain jacketed 300 Weatherby Magnum round that caught the gunner high in the chest and swept him off the roof of the Hummer like a rag doll snapped back by a bungee cord. His second round shattered the windshield and flattened the driver. The Hummer jerked to the side and rolled quickly into the shallow ditch beside the driveway. About half of the troopers suddenly found themselves caught out in the open and immediately turned to retreat back out the gate and behind the cover of the trees while the other half dove into the ditch and behind the now dead Hummer. With the threat of the heavy machine gun gone the defenders let loose a vicious volley that shredded the retreating troopers and severely cut off those huddled behind the Hummer. The Lieutenant had now effectively lost almost half of the soldiers that he had arrived with just fifteen minutes earlier.

He had to think of a way to turn this around and quickly. Suddenly he got a flash of inspiration. He called together the remaining Staff NCO's and laid out his plan. He was about to make the third mistake of the day and it wasn't even noon yet.

Malcolm cautiously looked out the garage door. There was no one in sight. Now he had to decide which direction to go. Well he knew what was behind him and he certainly didn't wish to return to that. Then he remembered something from his sailing days. Never run from a storm because it will certainly catch up eventually, run to the side and skirt it. He took several large breaths and tried to calm his nerves. He needed to cross the back yard and get over the fence quickly, but not too quickly. The first steps were the most difficult. He wanted to race away from there, but knew he had to look like just another one of the guards doing his job. It seemed to take hours to cross the sixty feet of suburban lawn. He looked up and down the fence line and could see no one. Stepping up on the lower crosspiece he quickly jacked up a leg and rolled over the top of the fence. He crouched on the other side and tried to still his pounding heart. He listened carefully and after a few seconds thought better of it. He had to keep moving. In less than ten minutes he had put several blocks of houses behind him and felt the need to get under cover and change out of the dead guard's uniform. He didn't want to take the chance that any kind of sending unit was hidden somewhere in the clothing or gear.

The small town had a haunted feel about it. It was as if everyone had simply walked off and left, like something out of the Twilight Zone. Malcolm kept near the front of the houses as he quickly moved down the street. He was never far from some form of cover. He had no desire to be recaptured and to that end was prepared to fight to the death if necessary. As he moved across the front of yet another house something caught his eye. Through the curtains in the front window he spotted several pairs of deer antlers mounted and hanging on the wall above the fireplace.

“A HUNTER!” The thought suddenly flashed through his mind.

He moved quietly through the side gate and cautiously worked his way around the house checking every window and door. It was sealed as tight as a drum. But they had a sliding glass door that lead out to the wooden deck in the back, if he was lucky he had a way in. Using the bayonet from the dead trooper he wedged it under the track of the big glass door.

“Now if they haven’t pinned the door.” He muttered to himself.

The blade began to lift the large glass door and he pushed it off and away from the restraining latch. HE WAS IN!

Cynthia watched Angel from the second story bedroom window as he went about his daily routine in the gardens below. He carefully tended each and every plant, inspecting them carefully, nurturing their individual growth. He practically knew each one personally. She marveled at the tenacity with which he carried out this daily inspection. He kept meticulous records of everything he did in the gardens. He justified all this work as necessary to ensure their survival.

“In all plagues there are survivors, both plant and people.” He would tell her. “We’ve (meaning Cynthia and Angel) had already made the first cut, we survived where millions have perished.” He explained to her that he now intended to find or breed all the plant survivors and build from there.

At first she thought that his dream was impossible, but as each week faded into months she began to fully realize his commitment to this monumental task and she began to respect him even more for it. She often wondered how her parents were doing, or even if they were still alive. There was still no way for her to safely travel alone and she was sure that Angel would never abandon his mission here. And she would never ask him to do that. This was his legacy from his mother, somehow if he could keep this going it was like she was still alive or at least part of her was. Cynthia had heard him occasionally late at night when the stillness of the dark cloaked everything in its velvet wrap, his sobs, hushed and near silent. She could feel the loneliness that weighed down on him and admired the

determination that he met each day with.

It was strange to her this bond that he had with his mother, a bond that reached beyond the grave. She had never really felt close to her parents. She thought about that now and again as she went about her daily routine. They were always so busy with this or with that. It was always.

“In a minute, honey. Not right now dear. Can that wait a second, Cyn? We’ve got to go now – we’ll talk about then when we get back, OK?”

But it was not OK. To Cynthia, her parents were like store manikins, plastic and hollow, the image of a person but somehow not very real when you got up close to them. She could not imagine a parent that would actually take the time to listen to the questions of a small child or a teenager for that matter. She would listen to Angel describe the things his mother would do or say and felt that somehow she had been cheated when the parents were given out. Sure she had all the toys, all the benefits of well to do upper middle class parents, but not what was really important. Not the little things that really mattered. For the first time in her life, Cynthia had time to really think about these things and about herself. She had gone to the college of her parent’s choice because it was the place to be. Took the classes that were the right ones, in the right degree program, belonged to the right sorority, drove the right make of car and wore the right brand of clothes, but it all had no meaning for her. She was not the least bit interested in any of it. So now what?

The world that she knew had radically changed. Angel called it a hiccup, Cynthia felt like it was much closer to the world convulsing with dry heaves. Either way, she knew that she could never return to that place she had been in just a few short months back. She wasn’t too sure just where she was in her own life at the moment, or who she was for that matter. But she had discovered that she liked it where she was, and that she liked who she was with. It was several days later while working with Angel in the garden as they were repotting plants that it finally hit her. She loved working in the soil and she loved working with plants and she loved working with him. She paused and stood up, staring off into space.

At first Angel didn’t notice that she was silently standing there looking off into oblivion. Then he caught her still form out of the corner of his eye. He looked at her and then strained his ear to hear what it was that had caught her attention.

“What is it?” He asked in a whisper.

She just stood there looking off into the distance.

“Cynthia...what is it?” Again he asked in a slightly louder whisper.

“Cynthia?”

“CYNTHIA?”

“Oh!” Her train of thought suddenly broken she rapidly blinked her eyes and looked at him...in a strange sort of way he thought.

“Are you OK?”

“OK?” She answered meekly.

“Yes, are you OK, did you hear something?”

“Oh...ah...yes, I mean no, I didn't hear anything. I...mmm...OK...ah was... just thinking.”

He looked at her quizzically.

“And?”

“Ah, I'll tell you about it....um.... later. Now how many more plants do we have left to do?” She returned to work and blissfully ignored his confused expression.

Damian watched as Old Man Jacobson and his grandson Walter cranked the strange contraption aloft over the water tank on the roof. Once they had secured the cables that held it into place Walter yanked on the lanyard that pulled out the restraining safety pin on the turbine blades. Slowly the windmill began to spin, steadily gaining speed in the slight breeze. Jacobson watched the needle on the amp meter dance and finally steady out.

“THE JUICE BE FLOWING WALTER!” The old man called out. “THE JUICE BE FLOWING!”

“If I hadn't seen it wit me own eyes I wouldn't be believing it.” Damian commented. “So what did you build dat out of?”

“De outer part is a big truck brake drum, we build da rest out of junkyard parts. Walter he rewind de alternator to make it de generator and wit de magnets in de brake drum we get da juice flowin.”

“Walter you can build more of these?”

“Sure Bro! I got the plans off the Internet before everything went down. Gramps and I can build lots of these if you can get us the parts.”

Damian looked up at the spinning wind turbine blades. “You'll get what ever you

need Walter, what ever you need.”

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 46 – Sweet Dreams & Nightmares

"Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

Theodore Roosevelt

"We will either find a way or make one."

Attributed - Hannibal (247-1893 B.C.) Carthaginian General

Malcolm carefully slid the sliding glass door open and listened patiently for a few minutes before he slipped inside and quietly pulled the door shut behind him. There was an eerie stillness about the house as he slowly reconnoitered the dwelling. The place had the feel as if someone had just left only moments before. There were dishes in the sink waiting to be washed, cups on the countertop near the coffee maker that as he got closer could see small circles of fuzzy mold beginning to form in one of the coffee cups that was still half full. Some sort of dark goo was leaking out the bottom door of the refrigerator; he avoided stepping in it as he made his way into the living room. Cautiously he moved out of the direct line of the large front window. Looking out from the side hidden by the curtain he watched for several minutes and then carefully closed them slowly. He then turned to explore the rest of the house.

Upstairs he found the beds all made and neat, but there was some evidence that a hasty departure had been made as drawers were open and closets looked like they had been pulled apart quickly. The bathrooms were missing the normal toothbrushes, razors and bottles of hair products that one would have found stacked across the sinks or in the cabinets. Who ever had lived here had left in an awful big hurry and took only the barest essentials that they could grab quickly before they departed.

Malcolm found the gun cabinet in the upstairs den, or office. There was computer with stacks of bills and the usual paperwork that collects around the day-to-day functioning of a middle class family piled beside it. The gun cabinet was open and completely bare. Malcolm checked the drawers on the bottom of the cabinet and they too were stripped bare. He continued on through the house. There had been at least three children that lived here judging by the kid's bedrooms, two boys and a younger girl. But they were long gone and Malcolm hoped alive and well somewhere else.

Moving back through the kitchen he carefully avoided passing by any of the open drapes in the room. The last thing he wanted was to be spotted casually by any one that might just happen to be looking in his direction. He needed time to think, time to prepare and plan the next leg of his escape.

Through the laundry room he entered into the garage. It was dark and only lit by the small amount of light coming in through a side window and the small narrow milky windows high up on the garage door, but it was enough. Here too were the signs of a hasty exit, but Malcolm was elated by what he found still there. Camping equipment, a torn backpack, several sleeping bags, some well worn lanterns, tarps, and so on. He was virtually naked in a hostile world, locked in survival mode and needed anything he could get his hands on if he was going to escape from this area post haste. But the biggest prize of all was an old CJ-5 sitting off to the right in the garage. He went over to it and ran his hand across the front fender. Who ever the previous owner had been they had taken good care of this old warhorse. It showed the normal scars and dings you would expect from a jeep that had actually been used. Its tires were worn but more than adequate with deep lugs that could carry a person over hill and dale if necessary. There was no oil dripping underneath onto the concrete. The soft top showed signs of repair but was intact and more than adequate to keep the weather off the driver. It must not have been too old as the plastic windows showed only the slightest signs of aging and none were cracked, as they are prone to do over time. Now if it ran. Malcolm looked around the workbench and then remembered.

Back into the house he went and near the back door he found the key rack. Clearly displayed on a Jeep key fob was a set of keys. He snatched them up and then headed back out to the garage. He stood there for several seconds and then carefully loosened the straps on the gas mask that he was wearing and broke the seal. The air was a bit dusty and smelled of WD 40, old grease and oil, in other words....a garage. The air tasted sweet and easily filled his lungs after breathing though the mask. He slid into the driver's seat and laid the M-16 beside him on the passenger's seat and after pushing in the clutch inserted the key and carefully turned it. The panel lights lit up and then with a slight bit more of pressure the engine kicked over. He let it run for a few seconds and then cut it off. His heart was pounding and the smell of the Jeeps exhaust was the sweetest smell he had ever known. The gas gauge showed that he had nearly a half tank of gas on board and he watched the needle slowly drop after he turned everything off. He had his escape vehicle.

The next hour was spent going through every nook and cranny of the garage pulling out anything that Malcolm thought could be of value when he made his run for freedom. In several large metal ammo cans that had been pushed under the work bench Malcolm made a monumental discovery. Here were boxes of ammunition, hundreds of rounds. He quickly went through the markings and located nearly five hundred rounds of fresh .223 caliber rounds. Alongside that were hundreds of rounds of .30-06, .308, and thousands of rounds of .22 caliber long rifle stacked in neat bricks of 500 in one of the cans. If only that gun cabinet had been full. But regardless of whether he actually had weapons of that caliber or not, Malcolm quickly lifted the heavy cans up and into the back of the Jeep. That was when he heard the first beat of the helicopters blades overhead. He

froze instantly and listened, his ears straining to evaluate every vibration that they received. It was coming closer.

Buck spotted the group first from his perch on the rooftop. Using the chimney as cover, he glassed the perimeter inch by inch. He could just see the Homeland Security Officer waving his arms through the trees as he gave instructions to a small group of soldiers. They intermittently looked towards the militia lines through the trees and off to their right. When they started to move Buck had a pretty good idea where they were headed.

“Pop! They’re going to try to come around our left side!”

Kevin looked up suddenly. “Which side?”

“Looks like they’re using the cut in the road to hide behind and then they’ll swing wide and come up on the other side of that thicket of trees.” He looked back over the top of roof ridge again. “Yep, they’re headed that way!”

“Shit!” Kevin muttered to himself. If the troops could command that thicket it would put them within sixty yards of the house and partially flank the left side of the militia line. Kevin looked down the line and ran the numbers. He and Buck had impediments placed near the front of the property and at likely approaches but couldn’t possibly encircle the entire property line. There was neither time nor material available. He looked down the militia line.

Kevin tapped the shoulder of the older gent next to him.

“Those two boys down there.” He motioned to the young football jock looking lads near the garage.

“The Larkin boys?”

“Yeah, the pair that look like football players, can they shoot?”

“Shoot hell, they’ll pop the eye out of a crow at near a hundred yards!”

“Good!” Kevin patted the old man on the shoulder and nodded towards the soldiers beyond the trees. “Keep ‘em honest, friend.”

“Aim, too.” The old man replied and lifted his '03 Springfield with practiced ease and let fly a .30-06 greeting through the trees.

Kevin high crawled over to the Larkin brothers. “I need a couple of young fellows that can keep up with me and shoot straight....are you game?”

The two bushy haired high school seniors looked at each other and then quickly back to Kevin.

“Sure, what do you need?”

“Follow me and get ready to kick some ass!” Kevin popped up and sprinted as low as he could get back towards then behind the house. The boys flagged a couple of other corn fed lads like themselves and the small group let out at breakneck speed behind their new leader. Kevin kept the house between them and the Homeland Security perimeter until he could be assured that their movements would be masked by the grove of trees behind the house. It was Kevin’s plan to beat the Troopers into the thicket and catch them when they left the cut in the road and made for the trees. Caught out in the open he could quickly seal that flank and leave a few shooters behind to hold it down.

His feet pounded the soft ground and kicked through the tall grass. He could feel the burning in his legs and lungs at they barreled through the brush and then sprinted across the last open space before hitting the thicket. The Larkin’s along with four or five of their peers were hot on his heels and nearly caught up with him when they hit the thicket at full throttle. Kevin ducked, bobbed and weaved his way at top speed through the tight tangle of trees. He moved with more power than finesse, his rifle at port arms, branches slapping him in the face, ducking larger limbs. They had to reach the other side first.

They hit the middle of the thicket with a full press and then hit the enemy troopers head on as both groups collided into each other from opposite directions at full speed. Kevin saw the barrel pointed at him and dove to the right as the muzzle flash burned across the left side of his cheek and whipped past his neck. Before he could pull his own trigger he slammed into another trooper and folded the unprepared soldier neatly in half blasting all the wind out of him and nearly snapping his spine in the process. Kevin hit the trooper so hard that he felt like he himself had farted corn dogs. His momentum drove the trooper backwards and into another. Kevin hit the ground, rolled and came up blasting. The FN barked with the authority of hellfire that it carried in the shape of .308 at point blank range. There was no doubt that death was screaming around the thicket. For ten, fifteen, twenty seconds it was total mayhem, absolute elbows and assholes insanity as each side caught by the unexpected pointblank encounter scrambled desperately to stay alive.

Kevin emptied his rifle into several amazed troopers and then began to wield it like a battle-axe as he waded into the fray. Several times he felt something burn into him but it only fed his rage as he the whipped the FN around with the velocity that seemed to crack the very air itself. For the second time in his life he only saw red. Everything was focused on total havoc, the blood of some ancestral berserker burned like fire in his veins; he had become one of the dogs of war.

Then...suddenly.....there was silence, as piercing as a sirens wail and almost painful in its intensity. Kevin stood panting, anxious, waiting, a hulk on guard, wanting another target, another victim. The metallic taste of blood was thick in the air and he struggled to breathe it in. Slowly the color began to fade from his vision and the red was replaced with gray and greens, browns and blues, the normal spectrum of the living world. Gradually his sanity descended back upon him and he looked around himself at the carnage he and his militiamen had delivered.

The Larkin brothers were off to his left. One setting down and leaning back against a tree, wounded but still alive. The other was on his knees, trying to push himself away from the lifeless corpse that only moments before had been some mothers son. A young militiaman that Kevin didn't even know lay dead on the edge of the carnage, his head opened up from the impact of several high velocity rounds. The others in various shape staggered as if thunder struck through the dead and the dying. The world suddenly began to spin around him and Kevin reaching out felt the rough bark of a old tree against his palm and using it as a brace, he heaved the evil that had dwelt within him during the rage of battle out upon the bloodied ground.

"MY GOD, THE PRICE OF FREEDOM!" He thought to himself as his stomach convulsed once more.

Flight Lieutenant Briggs, RAF banked his Tornado reconnaissance aircraft and followed the creeping brown rust colored foliage with his naked eye. You didn't need special camera films or lenses to see this. What ever had been unleashed upon the Yanks was now loose over most of the British Isles and now had a firm footing on the continent as well. And worst of all, it was spreading....fast.

Phillip looked up from his vineyards and watched the British plane bank slowly and cross above his valley. They were flying over nearly every day now, both British and French planes. At first he thought is was just another training jaunt, but with the spreading wilt had come the aircraft. As if they were watching the daily progress of this creeping manage. Still the local farmers had heard nothing from the Agricultural Bureau and there was nothing on the news as well, but it was everywhere and it was getting worse. If something wasn't done quickly, Phillip would loose his entire crop of grapes. Not only that, in both his and his father's gardens, everything was turning brown. Yet there was nothing but silence from the world around them. Well, his farmers union was meeting tonight. Tonight they would get some satisfaction or they would blockade the roads with their farm equipment until they did get a response.

Phillip tossed his hoe against the building and began the long walk down the hill

to his father's house. Perhaps Poppa would have some advice, or at least a glass of wine to calm the nerves. If something wasn't done soon, he would lose his entire crop. This was not good, not good at all.

Cynthia lay awake looking at the ceiling of her room. The cool evening air blew in through the open window and chilled her exposed cheeks. She snuggled further into the warm thick comforter and floated in that moment between wakefulness and near sleep. Her thoughts drifted on the evening breeze in the half shadows of night. She pondered how her life had taken such an abrupt turn. She had been headed down a road towards a meaningless life that others had picked out for her. Everything prim and proper, upper class, decked with the trivialities that were required of her position or the aspirations of her parents. She was of course expected to marry the proper upwardly mobile young man, have the proper number of children that would attend the proper schools and continue the proper aristocratic line of properly sophisticated arrogant *****s that all her family ultimately became.

But in the garden just the other day it hit her. Like a skyscraper being dropped on top of her, she suddenly became aware. An epiphany, one of those rare moments in life where everything... just for a moment... becomes suddenly crystal clear. With her hands in the dirt, there in the green house, beside Angel she was at home. At HOME! This was where she was supposed to be, where she was supposed to stay and with whom she would spend the rest of her life with. She didn't know who she was anymore. She surely wasn't Cynthia Mathews-Saxons of the Baltimore Mathews-Saxons, even though she had never even lived in the state that housed Baltimore, let alone Baltimore itself. They had always been the Baltimore Mathews-Saxons, like that really meant something to anyone. For the first time in her life she actually felt real, like she was someone. She pulled the comforter closer around her neck and rolled over onto her side. As she drifted off to sleep the last thought that passed through her mind was how she was going to convenience Angel that they were going to get married and that it was his idea. She fell asleep with a warm smile on her face.

A series of dark limousines pulled into the underground garage and discharged their passengers into separate elevators with assembly line precision. It was well past the normal operating hours for such meetings, even in Geneva, but the situation was quickly reaching an apex and decisions had to be made. Six men walked into the conference room alone, that was the understanding that none of them would violate. No stray conversations, no stray ears, what was said in that room, stayed in that room until the consensus was reached. The stakes they played were far too high to risk even the slightest miss step, and they knew full and well the penalties for violations of that sacred trust. Retribution was swift,

vicious and thorough.

When the last member was seated around the table the eldest member dropped the gavel three times in ceremonial fashion.

“Gentlemen, we are convened.”

Desert Doc

Pax Americana – 48 Respite

“Well Lazarus, my name’s Mark. I’d say that I was pleased to meet you, but under the circumstances...” Mark said to the young man before him.

He grinned to show that his words were a wry joke, then looked around their piece of forest once again. The milky sun’s position in the afternoon sky shone through the canopy, dappling the soft humus of the forest floor. A slight breeze ruffled the branches and occasionally peeked under a leaf. The man that the boy had shot lay cooling before them. He turned back to the boy.

“How’s the leg?” he asked.

“It hurts.” replied the boy. “Did you put the bandage on me? Thank you.”

“Yeah, I put it on. I also got a good look at the wound, too. Who shot you?”

“Bad men. Like that one.” He said, pointing at the dead man in front of them.

“I figured that. Listen, we need to find some place to hole up. That town is probably crawling with bad men, scared men, and good men who can’t tell the difference. Your leg looks bad. I’d have liked to gotten you to the hospital, but...” He broke off and looked away from the boy for a moment, overcome by a feeling of anger at his helplessness. “But I don’t think I can. I think we’ll both get shot if we try. I’m...I’m sorry.”

“Mr. Mark, you are a good man, and I trust you to make this decision. “

“Well, thanks for your trust, but I wish I was a doctor. Or owned a tank.”

“What should we do next?”

“Like I said, we need some place to rest and recuperate. You need to be off that leg for a while. It’s not going to heal right if we keep re-opening it.”

Mark did not add that he wasn’t sure the leg would heal at all, but the kid was awake and thinking coherently, and that was an improvement over six hours ago. They really did need a place to rest.

“Where are we?” asked the lad.

“We’re about five miles from Trinkston. I was taking you to the hospital there when...this happened” He gestured at the man who lay before them.

“Trinkston? That is fifty miles from where...” Lazarus abruptly stopped speaking.

He thought, and then finished his sentence, "From where I used to live."

Lazarus thought a while longer as Mark moved to search the body.

"Is that County B?" He asked as he pointed to where Mark's shot-up Eagle leaned forlornly into the ditch.

"I think it is." said Mark.

"I think I know a place for us. It is not much, but it is dry and not well traveled. It is nearly ten miles from here." said Lazarus slowly. "I do not know if I can walk that far."

"Why walk when we can ride?" grinned Mark as he continued to look for anything of value from the corpse on the ground. "I'll go get this guy's four wheeler in a few minutes. My car's all shot up and won't move anyway."

Lazarus remained seated on the ground while Mark worked. One of Lazarus' rounds had struck the man's rifle right in the action. It was oddly deformed, and Mark could not work the action. He was able to open the flush magazine and remove the five .270 rounds that nestled there, and shoved them in his pocket. You just never knew when they'd come in handy. Mark's search turned up little else of value, until he rolled the man over. He made a noise of surprise and stood. In his hand, he held a blued revolver. He eyed the young man lying against the bole of a tree, then walked to him.

"You did OK with the Glock, but I'd kinda like to keep that with me. Are you willing to carry a gun of your own?"

"I wish I did not have to, but in the past few days, the world has changed. I must change too. Yes, I am willing to carry a gun to defend myself. Us." The boy said.

"It's a tough choice. But today proves that sometimes you have to take care of yourself. You did good. Let's teach you to do better." Mark sat down beside him. "The pistol you used is an autoloader. It has a magazine of cartridges that feeds into the barrel to be fired whenever the trigger is pulled. It can be a pretty complicated mechanism."

He held forth the revolver. "This is a revolver. It holds six rounds, and is pretty foolproof. If you don't have a lot of experience or practice, this is probably the way to go for you."

Mark showed him the revolver, explaining the cylinder release, loading and unloading, along with the double action trigger pull. He spent several minutes explaining the sights, and Lazarus practiced lining them up and dry firing the pistol. He also practiced dumping empties out of the cylinder and using the speed

loaders Mark had found to load the cylinder.

At last Mark was satisfied. "I think you've got it, but it's easy now. When someone's shooting back, it gets a lot tougher. We may find some place to practice, but for now, I think it's best if we keep a low profile. Plus, there're only about twenty rounds for that thing. Sit tight, and I'll go get the four wheeler."

He looked hard at the boy. The entire episode had taken much from him, and he was pale, covered in a sheen of sweat. He had concentrated his sheer will on absorbing Mark's important lessons, but he was still an injured boy. Mark took this in as he checked his M-14 then moved to walk quickly quietly away. He stopped for a moment and looked at the boy.

"There still may be bad guys around here. Be careful, and just make sure it's not me you are shooting at."

Lazarus nodded and shivered as his teeth chattered in the cooling afternoon. He watched Mark fade into the trees, and wrapped his arms tightly around himself. If he could only get warm. He was wearing only his heavy, dark blue shirt, and the cooling fall breeze cut through it with a numbing ease. He looked at the body on the ground. The man that tried to kill them wore a drab army jacket, which now had several bloody holes in it. Lazarus decided that he didn't care: His blood, the blood of the dead...It didn't matter. There was a jacket, and he was cold.

He tried not to look at the face as he rolled the unwieldy weight of the dead man this way and that to remove the jacket. The man's inert form resisted the movement, and Lazarus became angry and frustrated with the struggle. He punched the recalcitrant body. It made him feel strange. Bad and ashamed but yet exhilarated. It made his rage grow, instead of diminish. Again, he struck the body. And again. And again. He strangled an inarticulate scream in his throat as he began to strike the body with his clenched fists. Over and over he pummeled the corpse, his pent-up anger and fear pouring from him in a violent stream as tears flowed from his eyes. He choked back screams as he continued to batter the dead man. Anger for the destruction of his way of life, the loss of his faith, and the brutal witness of two women raped nearly to death fueled his rage and despair. The fear of his own possible death -slowly by infection-, or quickly -by another man with a gun- added to his horror and anger. His limited supply of strength was soon spent, and he collapsed into a heap, sobbing and clutching the bloodstained jacket to his chest with the revolver in one hand. He wept in frustration and self-pity.

He soon heard the engine of the four-wheeler becoming louder, and used the backs of his hands to wipe the tears from his face. He snuffed the watery stuff from his nose back in, and wiped his nose on his sleeve. His chest continued to heave from exertion and sobs, and it continued even after Mark rode the four-wheeler into the little clearing, stopping close to him.

Mark killed the four-wheeler's engine and looked at Lazarus.

"Hey, are you all right?" He asked.

"No," replied the boy. "I don't feel well at all. Let's get someplace for the night. I'm cold and tired." He told Mark.

"Sure. We need to see if those bastards left me any of my stuff. A lot of it sure could be useful right about now."

"Very well. Where do I sit?"

"Right behind me. I'll go easy." Mark promised. The boy grasped the cargo rack on the rear of the large-tired four-wheeler. As he raised himself to a semi-standing position, favoring the injured leg, he went even more pale and slumped forward across cargo rack. Mark quickly dismounted the machine and rolled him onto his back, then pivoted his hips so he could rest the boy's feet up on the handlebars. He covered the shivering boy with the bloodstained jacket and then knelt beside him.

"Hey, Lazarus! Wake up, buddy! Come on!" Mark said as he gently patted the boy's cheeks. "Geez, I didn't know you were still so sick! Come on, buddy, we gotta get you someplace warm!"

The boy's eyes fluttered and then remained open. He looked around without moving his head, then said, "I am really dizzy."

Mark grinned. "At least you're still with me. I think you sat up too fast. Let's try it slower in a few minutes."

Lazarus closed his eyes and nodded. Mark let out a relieved sigh and looked around. There wasn't much to pick up. He had carried the boy and his rifle across the field, and not much else. There wasn't much that belonged to the dead man, and there wasn't much on the four-wheeler. He hoped the marauders had not had the chance to swipe much from the back of his car. It looked like he was going to need that stuff to get by. To get him and Lazarus by. He started out doing a good deed for the boy, and he had returned the favor by saving Mark's life. An uneven trade, if there ever was one. Mark began to idly pick up some of the 9mm brass casings that lay on the ground.

It was possible, even probable that the boy would die. The leg wound did not look good. He was still pale and clammy, probably suffering from both blood loss and maybe an infection. He feared that it was too late for him to do anything about it. If he had been a doctor, and had all the right equipment, maybe he could debride the wound and clean out all of the dead tissue. He could maybe give a couple

units of typed and cross-matched blood, and start him on some IV antibiotics. Hell, as long as he was fantasizing, why not wish for a hyperbaric chamber? There had to be something he could do, he thought.

He snapped his fingers: He had some antibiotic tablets! During the big anthrax scare, he bought some from an overseas pharmacy! The Cipro was too expensive, so he opted for some generic Erythromycin that the Mexican pharmacist assured him was effective against Anthrax. He didn't know if it would help the kid. There were many different antibiotics for good reasons. Not every antibiotic worked on every bacteria. He had no idea what germ might be infecting the kid's leg. He did know that any antibiotic given by mouth was a lot slower and less well absorbed than anything IV or even a shot into the muscle, plus the dehydration would make the kid's gut upset. He might even puke up the tablets, but once again, he was out of options. The Erythromycin was going to have to do the trick. It might help, and he didn't think it'd hurt, unless the kid was allergic to the stuff. He'd have to check that. His heart sank: He hoped he still had the medication. It was in his pack in the car. Mark also decided that he needed to look closer at the leg wound. He had his doubts about the wound healing unless the dead tissue was removed. He sure wished he could find a real doctor.

The boy sat up slightly. "I'm ready to try again." He said, slowly raising himself to a seated position. Mark walked quickly over and grasped his upper arm gently but firmly, and squinted at Lazarus face. It remained just this side of extremely pale.

"You all right? Not going to pass out again?" queried Mark.

"Not this minute, I don't think." The boy said with a faint smile.

Mark smiled back. "Well okay, then. Let's get this show on the road! I'm gonna take it pretty slowly. The plan is to go across this field to my car, grab what's grabable, then get out of here. I don't know if those assholes left a sniper out there or what, so we're gonna go pretty fast. This thing has about a full tank of gas. I am gonna park in the ditch and run up to the back of my car. Why don't you stay put and keep a lookout. If you see anything, holler."

"I can do that. We must travel away from Trinkston on County B for a ways. I don't know the road names, but I can tell you where to turn." said Lazarus.

"Any chance you know the way well enough so we can go cross country?"

"I'm sorry, no. But it's not terribly far."

Mark nodded and climbed on the four-wheeler, thumbing the electric start on the big four-wheel drive machine. The engine caught immediately, and settled to a soft rumble. He sat, and rolled cautiously toward the edge of the woods. He

stopped briefly at the tree line, glancing about, then depressed the thumb throttle to send the machine rapidly out across the field. He made random cuts and turns, hoping to throw off the aim of anyone attempting to draw a bead on them. He quickly horsed the machine into the shallow ditch. So far, so good. He heard no shots, and quickly jumped off the four-wheeler, scrambling up the far bank. He bolted to the back of the Eagle, then let out a groan as he saw the damage there.

The bandits had emptied his pack in a violent fashion into the hatchback of the Eagle to paw through when they arrived. He couldn't tell if anything was missing from the mess, merely grabbed his pack and began to cram anything within reach into the pack. It soon became evident that there was indeed some destruction. Rather than choose to open the pack via the drawstring and clasps, they had merely used a knife to slice it open.

In his mind, his back began to itch with the knowledge that there may be a set of crosshairs centering on them.

He frantically rummaged through the pack and found a small package with several lawn-and-leaf sized trash bags inside. He opened up a bag and began stuffing supplies into it. He glanced at Lazarus. The boy stood on the pegs of the four-wheeler and steadied himself by grasping the handlebars. He looked around carefully, staring hard at the surrounding terrain. Mark finished his task and brought the trash bag down into the ditch along with some bungee cords that normally lived in the back of his car. He quickly put the first bag inside the second, then strapped it to the rear cargo rack. He decided to make one more trip to the back of the car for the winter gear he had stored inside. They would need it. He made the trip without hearing a shot, and secured the untouched bucket to the front rack. Lazarus said nothing and continued to look around at the surrounding terrain.

Soon enough, Mark came around to the side of the machine and mounted. He goosed the throttle and the machine leaped out onto the roadway. He accelerated rapidly, the big tires raising a loud howl as they rolled along the pavement. Both he and Lazarus hunched forward in an unconscious effort to make themselves smaller. Mark continued to juke the machine, which became increasingly difficult as their speed increased. Soon, however, they were well beyond the scene of the killing on small gravel roads, and wending their way through hills and coulees. There were few buildings to be seen, but those that were present almost universally had hay wagons or combines or gated blocking the driveways.

At last Lazarus indicated a dilapidated fence in some old, rusted barbed wire. Mark opened the gate easily, as it had no lock, and Lazarus pushed the throttle slightly to urge the machine forward through the gate, then Mark re-closed it behind them. They drove up a hillside, and into the trees, seeing no sign of recent human activity. They bulled their way a short ways through the forest, until

Lazarus finally directed them to a small shack abutting a sandstone cliff. The boards comprising the shack were weatherworn and faded and the tin roof was covered in a fine sheet of rust, but it looked sound. Mark dismounted the machine and stretched.

“You’re sure no one is here? No one...bad, I mean?” Mark asked, helping Lazarus off of the four wheeler.

“I cannot promise you anything, but I am very sure no one will find us here.”

Mark helped support the boy as they walked to the door of the shack. Lazarus turned the knob, then pushed the door in with a creak and shuffled inside. Dim light filtered through the dusty panes, revealing a simple room roughly ten feet wide by fifteen feet long. In the middle of the room squatted a round woodstove, and there were some pieces of split wood along the back wall of the shack. A two-tier bunk was in the corner, with no linen upon it, and beside it stood a lonely table, complete with three chairs. The ceiling was low, and cobwebs were strung generously from the rafters.

Lazarus pointed to a large metal-clad box near the door. “There are two lanterns in there, and some wool blankets, if the mice have not chewed through the box yet. I need one of those blankets, as I have to lay down now.”

He swayed on his feet for a moment, then steeled himself while Mark worked the hasp on the box. Mark reached inside and handed him a blanket.

“Thank you.” He said, and shuffled to the lower bunk and collapsed into it, covering himself with the thick woolen blanket.

Mark looked around. “Not much, but I’ll call it home. For now.”

AGreyMan

Pax Americana Chapter 49 – A Short Liberation

"It is folly to punish your neighbor by fire when you live next door."

Publilius Syrus

"Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force; like fire, a troublesome servant and a fearful master. Never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action."

George Washington, in a speech of January 7, 1790

There is a silence like no other when the wind subsides and the flakes of snow gently descend scrubbing the chill air of all sound. Brentwood could only hear his own muffled footfalls as they crunched through the crust of last night's snow. His quarantine was nearly up. Soon he would be brought into the greater family of the resistance. He wasn't quite sure just how he felt about that. He had never been a political person, a bureaucrat yes, but political... well, not very much. He left that quagmire for others to wade into. But the actions of his government, the clandestine actions, had finally forced his hand. At first he did not wish to believe, didn't think it was possible, but the evidence was too pervasive, too frightening to ignore. The terrorist attacks had somehow triggered a course of events that had been long planned for. Plans that lay hibernating deep within the bowels of the bureaucracy of Washington. Waiting in the silent and dust filled cabinet somewhere for just the right occasion.

What puzzled Brentwood was how passive his countrymen had become. Rather than rising up like the independent culture that we are lead to believe all Americans are, they instead cowered behind their televisions and demanded that others secure their freedoms. He thought back to the Thanksgiving meal just two evenings past. Even though he was still technically under quarantine, Dr. Anders, Nathan as he preferred to be called, had sprung him from his isolation to the "humble feast" as Mickey Davis called it. It was anything but humble.

The cabin was non-specific from the outside, stark, rustic, strong, like most of the buildings he had seen during his limited exposure to the militia compound. But once inside, it was like he had stepped into another world, another time. Mickey greeted him with a hot mug of cider with a large stick of cinnamon jutting out. The fire was warm and inviting and drew Brentwood to warm himself by it cradling the warm mug in his hands. He could not believe the decorations, the food, and the people. The world may be on the brink of disaster but you wouldn't know it from the looks of this cabin. More than twenty people crowded together in the first festive mood he had witnessed since the plague swept through the country. He recognized many of the faces among the gathering. He surmised that the majority of the people here worked in the clinic that he had been screened at. Perhaps their constant exposure to outsiders was why he was allowed to join

them tonight.

Brentwood listened to the idle chat and greeted the few people that he had already met in the clinic for about an hour before dinner was finally announced. His jaw nearly hit the floor when the meal was brought out. An enormous golden brown turkey, a honey baked ham, several large lake trout, freshly baked bread and a variety of vegetables, sauces, and hot freshly baked pies cooled on a sideboard near the gathering.

“Dr. Anders?” Brentwood began.

“Nathan, please.”

“Ah, er, Nathan...how is this possible ...” Brentwood’s voice trailed off, his eyes still fixed on the food.

Mickey leaned over to Brentwood. “All of this...” he waved his hand over the table. “Is courtesy of the underground economy and our own community supported farms.”

“But, but, there are shortages everywhere, we, I mean the government can’t...ah... hasn’t...” He stammered.

“Brentwood.” Nathan began. “Let me explain. Most of what you see here, the turkey, and most of the vegetables are locally grown. Even some of the fruit is ours while the oranges and grapefruit come from Florida smuggled in and traded for our northern wheat and maple syrup.”

“Maple syrup? In Michigan?” Brentwood asked.

“What, you think that New England is the only place where Maple trees grow?” Mickey chided him.

“No, but...”

Nathan continued. “We don’t need the feds to take care of us. Never did. What we can’t do for ourselves we have ways of getting through others. There are many like minded independent folks like us scattered throughout the country.”

“Yes I’ve heard of the underground economy, but I always thought that was a conduit for drugs.” Brentwood said as a large slice of turkey breast was plopped down on his plate.

“Sure that is what the government would like you to believe.” Mickey said as he was passing out more turkey.

“You are going to find out that the underground economy is considerable larger than people in the government even suspect, perhaps almost as large as the topside economy, Brentwood.”

“You put a tax on something and watch how fast people get going to try to get around it. Even the big boys do it.” Mickey added.

“We are a country full of entrepreneurs, Brentwood. That is our heritage. The Calvinistic ideal of hard work and manifest destiny is alive and kicking even now. Sure, there are many of our fellow citizens that have become fat, dumb and lazy sucking on the government teat. But when the taps are turned off, when government can no longer move due to its own burgeoning weight, choking and asthmatic due to its own red tape and floundering bureaucracy that I’m sure you yourself have seen, the people will learn to take care of themselves.”

“And once they get a taste of their own freedom do you think they will want to fall back under the yoke of an invasive tyrannical government?” Mickey added.

“There are always those individuals that prefer to be taken care of.” Brentwood countered.

“That is true, sad but true.” Nathan conceded. “But not here.” Nathan looked around the table. “If we can all join hands so that we may give thanks for the bounty set before us.”

Malcolm cautiously looked out the garage window staying well back in the shadows to catch a glimpse of the helo racing overhead. It was a Homeland Security job flying low over the rooftops. He backed away from the light and retreated further back into the depths of the garage. He strained his ears to detect the sound of the bird now fading off in the distance. He was still way to close to the point of his escape. But he dare not risk an escape run in broad daylight with helo’s in the air, as that would be sheer suicide. It was still several hours yet until nightfall. He was considering his alternatives when he suddenly became aware of the scrape of a footstep on the concrete walkway just outside the garage door leading out to the backyard. He froze and slowly brought the M-16 up to his shoulder. He could see the doorknob slowly turn as someone was quietly testing to see if it was locked. He instinctively coiled himself in anticipation. His heart pounded in his ears and he grit his teeth so hard that his jaw ached. He would not go back into that death camp. Not if he had any say in the matter. That’s when he noticed the doggie door move.

Desert Doc

Pax Americana Chapter 50 – Storm front

When they took the fourth amendment, I was quiet because I didn't deal drugs.

When they took the sixth amendment, I was quiet because I was innocent. When they took the second amendment, I was quiet because I didn't own a gun.

Now they've taken the first amendment, and I can say nothing about it.

"Confronted with the choice, the American people would choose the policeman's truncheon over the anarchist's bomb."

Spiro T. Agnew

"This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it or their revolutionary right to dismember it or overthrow it."

Abraham Lincoln, 4 April 1861

"Ian, why don't you begin."

"Ah well yes." He cleared his throat. "The botanical virus is spreading, albeit at a considerably slower rate due the current weather, however we can expect a rather firm foot hold on the continent and by the end of the next farming season much of Western Europe will be affected."

"Good, and what are the effects of the Plague? Any substantial outbreaks in your region?"

"Not yet, but with a few good topical applications we should be able to see significant movements in that area."

"What's the hold up Ian. Surely there's been more than adequate time since the American outbreak to lend credibility to its spread?"

" Oh yes, considerable credibility, Sir. Just waiting for the atmospheric window of opportunity to present it self. Doesn't do to progress with any aerial application with the current storm systems rolling across the region. Washes everything right out of the sky and down the gutters. But we are expecting a break with adequate clearing in about a week. Should be able to get in two or three applications before the next storm blows in."

"And what are your projections."

"Well Sir, we're using the new L-series variant which of course you know is much better suited to the genetic targets found in our zone of application. I would say

reasonable estimates should at least meet and quite possibly exceed the initial applications in the U.S.”

“That well, hmmm.”

There was a murmur around the table.

“And Africa?”

“Well that is another story all together Sir. Since the initial infection rates were nearly three times that of other regions we can expect this new binary variant once released to....shall we say, clean house Sir.”

“Very good, Ian, well done.” He turned to look back down the boardroom table. “Now Jonathan I understand your Yanks have run into a bit of a snag with some...armed militias? I would have thought that matter of citizens with personal weapons would have been resolved by now. Your president did declare martial law, did he not?”

“Yes Sir, he did.”

“And?”

“Well....Sir....it’s been ignored.”

“Ignored?”

“Yes Sir, rather strongly ignored I’m afraid.”

“How strongly?”

“Well you remember those two battalions of UN troops we borrowed to assist in the arms round ups?”

“Yes....”

“Well...Sir....we’ve lost them.”

“Lost them? You mean you can’t find them?”

“Well...no Sir, I’m afraid we’ve lost them...as in rather permanently I’m afraid.”

Malcolm aimed his assault rifle midway up the face of the garage door that led into the backyard. That’s when he noticed the flap of the doggie door move and a

small hand push itself through and onto the concrete garage floor to hold up the small curly headed child as it crawled through. Malcolm silently let out his breath and crouched down, his eye still locked on the door. The child wormed its way through the tiny opening and then stood up and barely able to reach and began to work at the doorknob. Click! The door was opened and another older child, a little girl slipped into the garage quietly closing the door behind her. She turned and froze as she locked eyes with Malcolm. For what seemed eons neither moved nor spoke. He slowly lowered the rifle.

"It's ok, it's ok....I'm hiding too." He said very quietly the older child, his voice just barely above a whisper.

His senses reached out to perceive every sound, every vibration, and every odor. He wondered if these two were alone and if so, how could that be? Where were their parents? Where was everyone? Just what the hell was going on here!

"Please MMMmister, we're just real hungry." The little girl stammered. The small cabbage patch sibling that had preceded her clung protectively to her leg.

"We didn't mean to..."

"That's OK, child, I'm a little hungry too."

Malcolm slowly rose up and took a couple of steps toward the children. They backed away and up against the shelves against the wall.

"It's OK, I'm just going to get us something to eat....is that OK?"

"Momma told me not to talk to strangers."

"That's real smart of your Momma to tell you that. My momma told me the same thing too."

"Your momma told you that? But you're, but you're growed up?"

"It's still good advice. Now, are you hungry?" He took a step closer but angled slightly away from the pair. He stopped and held out his hand. The little girl looked it.

"My name is Malcolm, and yours is?"

She looked at his hand. "You're a black man." She said matter-of-factly.

He squatted down to be at eye level with her. Steadying himself with the AR in his left hand he was just a few feet from them.

“Yes, I’ve noticed that.” He smiled at them. “Are you and your little sister...”

“Brother!” She interrupted. “Jesse is my brother.”

“Oh, sorry. Are you and Jesse hungry? I sure am.” He said again offering his right hand out to her. “I’m Malcolm.”

She stood with her arms around her little brother protectively. “My name is Sarah, and like I said this is my little brother Jesse.”

“Good, now that we’ve introduced ourselves, we’re not strangers, little Miss Sarah.” Malcolm stood up slowly. “Now I’ll bet that we can find something to eat in the kitchen.”

She looked towards the open door leading into the house and nodded her head.

Malcolm turned and walked slowly into the kitchen.

“It’s kind of untidy in here Sarah, so please pardon the mess. Ahhh, here’s something. Would you and Jesse like some canned peaches. There’s some cereal here but I don’t think we’ll find any milk....”

The two children cautiously followed their new friend into the kitchen.

As the big Suburban rolled up the gravel driveway Ruger suddenly popped tall on the front seat beside Sgt Maj. Strothers. The big Rottie knew this place. The familiar odors that whipped in through the window had Ruger filled with anticipation. Strothers, too, looked forward to this visit. It had been a long road to finally reach his niece’s place on the opposite coast from where he started too many long months ago. So much had gone down since he received his retirement papers and headed west from Q-town. It was now an entirely different world far and away from the one he remembered.

The McMillan homestead resembled a fortress, almost medieval in appearance. While most of the obvious signs of the battle that had waged across their property for several days were gone, one didn’t have to look very hard to see that some serious shit had hit the fan here. Jeff could tell that all kinds of hell had been turned loose here despite the efforts to patch up the damage and reclaim the peace of this rural valley. The specifics he had yet to learn, but he did know that the battle had nearly claimed the life of his favorite niece and her husband. The word was that Denise had been badly wounded in the jackboot assault and he had heard also that too many good patriots had died here, but despite the best efforts of the new age Gestapo, the militia had held strong and carried the

day.

Jeff would have liked to have arrived unannounced and surprised them. But the day of such independent free travel and joyous surprises was long gone. He had entered their free zone the day before and was forced to wait until he received clearance to continue the journey deeper into the federally unoccupied territories.

The unoccupied territories were a scattered patchwork quilt of free zones loosely controlled by local citizen's militias. At best the term "free" was rather sketchy. In many areas the government forces might control the cities, larger towns and major highways during the daylight hours, while the patriot and militia forces ruled the night. After several rather nasty clashes the situation across the country had reached a wary stalemate, with each side waiting for the other to up the ante.

The Suburban finally rolled to a stop just outside the great iron gates. A pair of rather serious looking militiamen standing guard there eyed the crusty old Marine and his overgrown Rottweiler as they both bounded out of the truck. David emerged from the inner courtyard and met the Sgt. Maj. midway with a great bear hug.

"Sgt.Maj. you ol' son-of-a-bitch, you finally made it! Damn it's so good to see you!"

Strothers quickly noted his niece's husband as he approached had lost the softness that civilian life often casts on retired military. Jeff was reminded of the first time he had met David as a newly assigned Corpsman to his battalion. He had that swagger that seemed ingrained to sailors. But the ol' Sgt. Maj. could also recognize the carriage of a warrior; his old Doc was back in the groove again.

"Doc, you ol' pecker checker! What's this I hear you started the war without your Sgt.Maj?"

"Damn Sgt.Maj." David began shaking his head. "You could not imagine the mess we had here." He paused and looked Jeff straight in the eye. "We nearly lost Denise."

"I heard it was touch and go for a while here." The pair continued into the courtyard.

"You don't know the half of it. Hell they blew a hole in the side of my house with a SMAW!"

"A bunker buster!" Jeff said in amazement.

David nodded his head. "It took out one of my best friends and neighbors and nearly claimed Denise. She got messed up pretty bad and it was only by the grace of God and sheer luck that she made it out of the room alive."

"How bad?"

"Well, the local doc did the best that he could...under the circumstances..."

"How bad, David?" Strothers stopped and looked his old friend in the eye.

David took in a deep breath and let it out. "She's lost hearing in her right ear and there is some pretty bad scarring from the burns and shrapnel. But the worst of it..."

Jeff gripped his shoulder. David looked up with watery eyes, but doing the best to hold himself together.

"She lost an eye." He paused. "There just wasn't anything ol' Doc Bell could do. The damage was just too great."

Jeff blew out his breath. "Damn!"

"How's she taking it, son?"

"Well...some days are better than others."

"She's a tough ol' bird Doc. If she's got just half the spit and vinegar of either her ol' man or her mother, then she's got more than enough for a dozen folks. I'm here to tell you, her mother was no light weight in a fight...that's for damn sure."

"I seem to recall Denise telling a story 'bout both you and your bother dating her mom at the same time?"

"Shitfire, that gal had us both over a barrel until I came to my senses and joined the Marine Corps! Hell it was safer in combat than marrying that Irish banshee!"

They both chuckled and turned to enter the house.

There was a festive mood that filled the entire house. Cynthia had not seen so many people since the before the plague. Walking into the kitchen the rich aromas that filled the air made her mouth water. Momma Sanchez and Bea Howard commanded the activities there like two generals over a field army of madness amid a whirlwind of baking, cooking, tortilla making and banquet preparation. She never imagined that Angel even knew this many people or that

this many wonderful people had survived the deadly disease that ripped through the area, but here they were, in her house preparing the Thanksgiving feast.

Astonishment and tears came to Cynthia when they first started to arrive in the early morning hours. She could hardly believe that Angel had arranged all this in less than a week as the result of a passing comment. They had been sitting out in the greenhouse after a long day of work in the gardens. Gardens that had begun as an attempt to just survive had grown into a miniature farming operation. Angel had not only managed to find and breed disease resistance seed, but had done so well that together they put in over twelve hour days tending and harvesting the bounty of their suburban jungle.

Angel and Cynthia had been sharing how their respective families usually spent their holiday season. For Cynthia it was flying to some resort somewhere to spend the holidays with strangers. For Angel it always involved getting all the friends and neighbors together for a madhouse of an event. Everybody either brought or cooked their holiday meal there at his place. The house was full of people, kids running around, talking, drinking... a regular block party run amok. But when they all sat down to eat it was his mother that brought them all together. The eldest and youngest members of their extended family said the grace and cut the first slice of meat. The table was set with both traditional and exotic dishes and at that moment on that special day of Thanksgiving they were a family. Cynthia sighed and thought out loud what a warm image that was. She wished that she had spent her holidays that way surrounded with close friends and family. She leaned her head over on Angels shoulder and they sat quietly together as the daylight faded into evening.

And now Angel's house was a mad house. Cynthia had been introduced to so many new people that their names and faces spun around in her head in a windstorm. She had learned the secret to making a golden honey glaze for a ham, real pumpkin pie, fresh Italian bread, white bread, wheat bread, potlickers, tortillas, refried beans, Boston baked beans, vegetables of every description, and the list went on and on. The matronly women that commandeered her kitchen had her stirring this, sampling that as they one and all tried to pass on family recipes and kitchen secrets. She had never had so much attention before in her entire life, and she was loving the insanity of the event.

By mid afternoon the whirlwind suddenly ended as the meal was about to begin. Tables came out of nowhere, sheets of plywood were covered with table clothes and chairs of every description appeared and surrounded the long feast as it was laid out. The chair at the head of the table was the only place setting empty when Angel stood and waited for the room to quiet.

"Ahh...I'm not very good that this sort of thing." There was a chuckle that ran around the table. "I want to thank you all for joining us here today and make all this possible." Angel cleared his throat.

"I have left one seat empty..." He swallowed hard. "It is for my mother...and...all those people that we love that could not be here with us today." He bowed his head momentarily and then looked back up at the gathering. "But they are with us in our hearts."

"Mr. Ehler and Senorita Margarita Torres I believe it falls upon you for the Grace."

An elderly gentleman slowly rose from his seat midway down the table and a small little Hispanic girl dressed in her holiday finery was lifted up to stand on the chair beside him. The gathering clasped the hands of their neighbors and together they bowed their heads.

The old voice began. "Dear Lord, thank you for your bounty and the fellowship of this gathering. Protect us with your strength and guide us with your wisdom. These are hard times that we have before us and we need your guidance to see us through. Let us always walk in the path that you have set down before us and forgive us our sins." He leaned over towards little Margarita and quietly whispered to her. "Here's your part."

"In Jesus' name we pray...AMEN!" She said with gusto.

The gathering chuckled and then sat down to enjoy the bounty placed before them. Like one big family, the mood was alive and merry. Cynthia had never been happier in her entire life than she was at that moment. About midway through the meal Old Man Ehler tapped his glass with a spoon and rose to speak. Once he had everyone's attention he began.

"I would like to take this moment to thank each and everyone here for making this gathering possible. And I would like to especially thank Angel for coming up with this idea and badgering us all to make this event actually happen." He raised his glass to Angel. "To Angel MacMurtry-Chavez may you always be under God's good grace."

The entire room rose to their feet and joined the salute to their host.

"Now," Ehler continued, "I believe we should have a word from our host."

Angel was suddenly embarrassed and shook his head.

"Come on now Angel, you talked plenty to get us all here. Speech, SPEECH, SPEECH!"

The room took up the chorus and finally Angel stood amid the claps and cheers.

"I...ah, I...ah, don't know quite what to say."

“There’s a first!” came from down the table.

Everyone laughed.

“No...really. I can’t take credit for this idea.” He turned to Cynthia sitting beside him. “It was really Cynthia’s idea that we should have a Thanksgiving like we used to.”

“TO CYNTHIA!”

“TO CYNTHIA!” resounded down the table.

Now it was her turn to blush. Then the room became really quiet and all eyes focused on the young couple. Angel turned to her and held out his hands into which she placed hers. Then to her surprise he suddenly got down on one knee before her and she felt a shiver race up her spine.

“Cynthia, I have never told you this, but I think you know...” The pause hung in the air. “I love you.” The room was deathly still.

“I have never been happier than when we are together and I wish to be together with you for the rest of our lives...if you will have me.”

Cynthia’s eyes welled up with tears; her heart was pounding in her ears and racing with the wind.

“Will you marry me?” He finished.

The very air seemed frozen as every one held their breaths in witness. The steady tick tock of the clock on the wall echoed across the silent room. The seconds seemed to stretch into minutes as she looked into his eyes and saw the deep love and affection there.

A tiny voice, weak and fragile squeaked her reply. “Yes.”

The room erupted into cheers and laughter as the young couple embraced for the first time. Their new extended family gathered around them trading handshakes and hugs for several minutes before things began settling back down. The meal progressed until everyone slowly staggered away from the table, looking for someplace to loosen their belts and digest the largest meal they had all probably experienced in a very long time. Cynthia leaned her head on Angel’s shoulder and snuggled in his safe embrace. She had finally found a home and a family. Tears keep welling up and she could do nothing to stem the tide, nor did she really want to.

The generals of the kitchen then set about clearing the tables and setting out the deserts. Cynthia could not believe the array of treats and delights that came out of the kitchen one after the other. Then they brought out the coffee, freshly roasted the day before and ground just hours before the meal. The rich aroma filled the room. The evening wore on until, one by one, the guests drifted off on their way home. Several guests threw out their bedrolls and snored happily away on the floor off in the corners of the house. The old men told stories on the back porch and smoked their pipes and finished off the homemade wine. Cynthia joined in the clean up and in no time at all her kitchen was spic and span again.

She had never felt so much love, nor had she been hugged and kissed by so many people at one time. Cynthia could hardly believe the events of the day. It was like she was living in a fairy tale and if so she never wanted to wake up. When she went to bed that night it was with a warm glow and a deep affection that filled her to overflowing and the thought that she was getting married. She cuddled her pillow and drifted off.

Damian entered the Jacobson's workshop that comprised the entire basement of one of the five story walkups. It looked like a cross between an auto parts stockroom and a junkyard repair shop.

"Where had they got all this stuff from?" He wondered.

The shelves were crammed full of everything imaginable. Car parts, household appliances, motors, piles of wires, plumbing fixtures, pipe and God knows what else. Half the stuff he had no idea what it was. The entire basement level was crammed packed full. Boxes of stuff overflowed into the aisles between the metal shelving. This was in stark contrast to the actual working machine shop on the far end of the basement. Damian walked out of the dark storeroom and into a pristine combination wood, metal and electronics shop that would make any handy man's building genes drool uncontrollably.

Both Old Man Jacobson and his grandson Walter were hard at work building a half dozen of the new wind generators when Damian walked into the well-lit shop.

"Now justa little bit more... good, dat's good." The elder Jacobson was saying to Walter.

Damian stood quietly until the pair looked up.

"Hi Damian, be right wit cha." Walter looked back to his grandfather who was nodding with satisfaction.

“That should set up right proper, boy.” The Grandfather said.

“So where did you-all get the ide-er for this windmill stuff?” Damian asked.

“The grandson here came across it whilst surfin’ dat Internet a while back. Been bugging me to help him build one.”

“Oh Grandpa, like you don’t get jazzed doing this kind of stuff.”

The old man laughed. “Hee, hee, hee... you know that I do, boy. Yep, this here is sheer entertainment for me.”

“So where did you get this, Walter?”

“Oh, I ran across the website of a Scottish guy named Piggott.”

“Piggy?”

“No, Piggott. Yeah, thought his name was a little weird, but his stuff was great. Hugh, I think is his first name. Anyways, he started building wind generators out of all kinds of old parts. I was going to have Grandpa help me to build one for a science project at school before... well, before everything sort of...”

The excitement was growing in the young mans voice as he began to show Damian around the shop.

“Gramps got a lot of cool old books on how to build stuff, all kinds of stuff, check this out bro.” Walther started to pull out books from the shelf and lay them out on the table.

“Here’s the one we’re using now by Hugh Piggott. It’s called Brakedrum Windmill Plans. Here’s one on how to build something called a Producer Gas plant that can run a car or motor off of wood chips or coal instead of gasoline. Here’s a whole series of books by a guy named Dave Gingery that tells you how to make a charcoal foundry, and a metal lathe, and a shaper, a milling machine, a drill press, a power hacksaw and a whole lotta other stuff!” He said excitedly.

Damian looked back to the elder Jacobson. “Can you really build all this stuff?”

“Sure ‘nuff. We already got most of the stuff we need. The big hold up is power. Gotta have enuff power to run dez machines down here, den me and the boy kin make most any thang you want, Damian.”

Damian looked around the shop these two had put together from scratch and believed that they could indeed live up to their claims.

“Make me a list Mista Jacobson, and I’ll see to it you get wut you needz.”

The rain that had been coming down steady for the last several days soaking everything was now turning to snow as Kevin Jorgenson and his son drove out to the checkpoint south of town. There had been no major sign of the Homeland forces since the battle a month ago at the Robinson’s place. A few patrols from time to time ventured to within binocular range but they turned back at the first sign of the militia forces. Each side seemed to be keeping tabs on the other but neither made any attempt to engage in any direct action at the present time. Kevin didn’t like the idea of a stalemate but preferred that to the alternative of directly fighting the better equipped and more numerous federal forces.

The town had been busy since they won their independence getting ready for the hard winter to come. For the first time towns people that had been total strangers for all the years that they had lived in this mountain community began working together. Their first effort was to consolidate what supplies they could salvage from the abandoned houses through out the village. A thorough search of the Security barracks revealed a bonanza of ammunition, weapons, and military supplies as well as pallets of prepackaged military meals known as MREs. Between what they had gathered and the abandoned government supplies they would make it though the winter. But what would happen come spring was constantly on Kevin’s mind. They only had a few months to prepare before they would have to find a way to grow what they could no longer purchase on the open market. There would be no trucks arriving every few days to stock the shelves of the local grocery stores and, with the current standoff, it was highly unlikely that they would be allowed to venture forth to go shopping down in the lowlands. They were totally on their own, a situation they none of them had ever imagined before nor seen in their lifetimes.

The news from Washington was full of veiled threats and hollow promises of peace and returning prosperity. Kevin ignored it for the most part. It reminded him of political whining and more padded lies spewing forth from the cockroaches that resided in the Capitol. He didn’t know what would come of the current events and that did bother him, but he could not see the nation returning to the status quo of the recent past. Too much blood had been spilt for that to happen. He worried about the future for his children and all the children across the country. What was the legacy they were creating now that their descendents would have to live with years into the future? Kevin wondered if that was how the forefathers of this country felt when they broke away from the mother country.

Those thoughts were left hanging in the air as they arrived at the checkpoint. Buck lifted out the vat can of hot turkey and lentil stew and followed his father into the bunker. It wasn’t much of a Thanksgiving meal but it was hot and there

was a lot of it. Kevin and Buck took over the watch and manned the machinegun and recoilless rifle while the men on watch took a break and dug into the first hot chow they had received that day.

Kevin was reminded of the pictures of Washington's soldiers during the winter in Valley Forge. Huddled around small fires, trying to keep from freezing. He knew that Americans came from hardy stock...good seed. Perhaps what was needed from time to time was a good weeding in the garden of liberty. They had become too complacent with the freedoms their ancestors had fought so hard for. They had become slack in their vigil against the thieves that stalked the rights that every American had been born into, and as a result had to re-earn those rights the hard way. It was not easy what they did now. The price of freedom is never cheap. But it was necessary and right.

Kevin looked back out on the crisply snow white landscape and enjoyed the way it made the world look new and clean.

Brentwood awoke to pain, extreme pain. He had no idea of where he was or why. The last thing he remembered was walking home after the Thanksgiving meal at Doc Anders place. It had been snowing but not too badly and now his head of screaming and he couldn't see out of his left eye.

"He's coming too."

"Brentwood can you hear me?"

He tried to talk and suddenly found his mouth incapable to opening and the new pain in his jaw joined the screaming agony of the left side of his face. Brentwood mumbled something unintelligible and then he suddenly realized that his jaw was wired shut.

"What the hell had happened?" He mumbled.

"Brentwood, just calm down. You've had a nasty fall and banged yourself up pretty bad. You've fractured your jaw and probably blown your zygomatic arch and possibly your orbit as well."

"WHAT?" he mumbled.

"You've broken your jaw and your cheek."

"HOW?"

"The best that we can figure is that you slipped on some ice and went face first

into the frozen ground, rather hard I'm afraid. You've been unconscious for nearly three days."

"WILL I LIVE?"

"Well you did have us worried, but I think your coming out of the danger zone if... IF you remain quiet and let things heal up. You took quite a nasty knock to the melon and I want you to remain absolutely quiet for several weeks.

The next several days passed uneventfully. Doctor Anders had finally allowed Brentwood to return to his own cabin but not without warning him sternly that he was to remain there and that Anders would have someone checking on him regularly throughout the day and evening.

The shock came when he looked into the mirror for the first time. The entire left side of his face was one huge black and blue swelling. What ever he had hit sure left a wicked mark. Nearly the entire white of his left eye was blood red and looked like hell. Something had gashed his forehead pretty deep and required a considerable number of stitches to close. His head pounded every time he changed position and his greatest fear was from the waves of nausea that swept across him whenever he exerted himself in the slightest. It would not be a good thing to vomit with his jaw wired shut. To that end he carried a small pair of wire nippers that Doc Anders had tied to a string around his neck at all times. He prayed that he would not have to use them.

It was late at night about a week later when the serene calm of the snowy landscape surround his little cabin suddenly erupted. Brentwood quickly sat up from the noise and equally as quick wished he hadn't. The all too familiar sound of gunfire and explosions filled the night outside his cabin. The front door viciously exploded off its hinges followed by a squad of white clad soldiers racing in to secure the cabin. Brentwood was on his hands and knees beside the bed trying to clear his head from the dizziness that filled it. He heard heavy footsteps coming closer then someone grabbed his shoulder firmly.

"Brentwood Davis?" He was sternly asked. "BRENTWOOD DAVIS!"

He nodded his head slowly and tried to speak. A bright light suddenly blinded him.

"My GOD, what the hell have they done to you?" The soldier exclaimed.

"Quickly – get him bundled up and ready to travel!" the lead soldier barked.

"STRETCHER BEARERS!" The call went out.

Two of the burley soldiers hefted the weak bureaucrat up between them and

carried him out into the small living room of the cabin. Before he knew what was happening he was bundled into a sleeping bag and plopped down into a sled looking arrangement. The sound of gunfire seemed closer and the soldiers around him appeared to pick up the pace. As he emerged from the warm cabin the cold air slapped painfully against his bruised flesh and the medic carefully closed the hood of the bag tighter around his face until just his nose was visible.

The white ghosts with weapons slung, one pushing and one pulling the sled then slid him across the snow-covered ground and the trio disappeared quickly into the vast surrounding forest.

Desert Doc