If Lucas said "NO"

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If Lucas said "NO"

by Pascal in Quebec

Summary

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.
OH HELL NO, I AIN'T GONNA GO!

The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

WARNING; the language level of this one will be almost mild instead of the usual street-trashy when we consider a story based on boats and sailors. However, as I always warn people who read my work: this language was pretty much normal in the school yard 30 years ago when I was a teenager. So, how can you have such a thin skin and be part of the same culture on the same continent if this is really that offensive to you? Where did you spend the last few decades, if you can't take a few hard words from the mouths of kids when these words have been around since before World War I?

WARNING; the travels described in the fic are not necessarily matched to the buildings or services offered by the companies and localities in reality. This is a FF story, hence I write in such way as to make it coherent and believable. Which means that sometimes I will place trains or buses in localities the real companies don't operate. Contact Amtrak, Greyhound or Via Rail to get the real information.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

FIRST CHAPTER; OH HELL NO, I AIN'T GONNA GO!
Paternal enmity Aeternam

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Monday 14th of December, 2020; 13:00pm

Wolenbahn Inc, office of Lucas Wolenczak, president
San-Francisco, California, USA

The video screen was blank. It had been that way for almost a half hour now, closed off and cool, like the forgotten plate of call-in lunch and the mug full of old coffee. The blinds had been closed on the large glass walls that showed either the inside of the office building or the balcony outside, overlooking the four storeys down to the private inner courtyard of the office complex. All calls and emails had been configured to re-route to message boxes with the flick of a single little button on the touchscreen controller inset in the surface of the large, deep solid wood desk that dominated the room.

Huddled in the depths of his massive, cushy executive chair, Lucas heaved and spasmed silently, trying desperately to stanch the flow of tears rolling down his congested face. The silent choking sobs were so harsh they hurt his chest each time he coughed out and during one fit of anguish he actually bent over so suddenly his forehead banged on the desk's edge hard enough to rattle the picture frames and tableware.

Now disoriented and hurt about the head, with a small rivulet of blood sluicing down between his eyes and along his nose to mix with the salty tears of desolation, the poor 16 year old kid didn't know what to do anymore. Standing unsteadily, he leaned on the furniture around the large room so he could walk from the chair to the private en-suite bathroom for a first aid kit and a warm shower to wash away the pain and sorrow he was drowning in. Once inside, he locked the three mechanical locks and punched in a secret access code into the control panel besides the vanity mirror to lock down his entire office in secure mode for the day. Not even the cops or firefighters could come in unless they tore down the walls when that set of protections was engaged.

Sitting down on the swiveling stool covered in water & tear proof material specifically for such situations, he pulled open the vanity's many drawers to expose the kit assembled inside. It was a testament to how lonely and harsh his young life was that he needed to keep the equivalent of a St-John's Ambulance first responder's kit in his office bathroom. He had learned at a young age what happens when a kid from a rich, important family like his goes to the police or hospital for help even if it is life-threatening. The return home normally became a bigger threat against his welfare and often enough, his autonomy as well, no matter he was innocent and hadn't started anything. His father didn't see it that way and since he had a bigger checkbook and more contacts than Lucas did, then his voice, and his lies, were the ones that ruled the responses of adults around the situation. Not to mention that Lawrence and Cynthia were the ones responsible for most of the abuse he suffered to date, so no help ever came from them, quite the contrary.

The private seven-piece bathroom (sink, vanity, toilet, soaker tub, shower stall, washer & dryer) was both an immense luxury in any office but also a fundamental necessity in his life. Lucas had been officially housed in an old brownstone building owned by Stanford University's real estate division. It was composed of three habitable levels plus the basement for the garages and utilities. The antiquated 5½ room apartments had been refurbished into dormitories with two persons in each of the three bedrooms. The five boys he shared the second storey apartment with were almost the same age as him when he arrived, but not at all the same attitude. The Stanford University's 'Young Prodigies' program had severe deficiencies when it came to placing and monitoring the children in its care. The other boys were passive-aggressive, bullish and more interested in the discoveries of cheap
drugs and cheaper sex than studying or starting up a business like Lucas had done with his gaseous display consoles amongst many electronic products he offered.

Not only did the little bastards think it was okay to snoop around his personal things, they tried to steal his money, bank cards, company papers to sell on the black market, anything small and easy to turn over for a bottle of booze or a quick fix in the public toilets on campus. Then two years ago, when he just turned fourteen at the end of 27th December 2018, a thug tried to rape him in his own bed at the dormitory during the New Year House Party.

He had permanently moved into brand new office spaces in a new office complex after that event.

The other teens in the apartment had collaborated with the attacker because they thought Lucas was acting too high and mighty with his little company. Back then, his only publicly known company, Wolenbahn Electronics Inc in Buffalo, already had twenty employees and established orders for about five million dollars worth of consoles and other cybernetics. Nobody except a handful of lawyers and secretive employees knew about his many houses, businesses and warehouses around North America, all courtesy of his ancestors, especially his great-grand father, despite that he had been a cold despicable bastard too. Lucas never gave money or loaned out to the boys as he knew them to be slovenly and lazy, without any revenue other than allowances from their families. Anything he loaned out would be gone and never come back; he had by others who had lived in the building before. None of the other young boys were trustworthy and not a single one would hesitate to steal, defraud or extort from him if they could.

Well, because he didn't accept to be their victim and cash cow over the years, they finally decided that when an older guy in his early twenties showed a depraved interest in him, they would help him to come in and lock them in the room from the outside until the deed was done. Then they would negotiate with Lucas to get 'protection' money by threatening to make it happen until they got paid to keep the building's doors locked. Then, they would force him to do their homework and term projects for them so they would all have better grades while doing jack-shit nothing to earn it all.

The result stunned the kids, their parents and the Stanford administrators all together. Lucas had detected the date-rape drug in his food early in the evening and gone to his room to inject himself with an antidote he kept there, in his office and on his person at all times. What people aren't aware of is that Stanford is an incredible university with top notch science, medicine and law faculties. Unfortunately, it also has a pervasive disease that affects the entire campus; it is one of the worst places in terms of what is called 'rape culture' by the media. The college boys, especially those in the sports programs, just call it 'easy fun for the night'. Spiked drinks, tainted food, handshakes with a contact poison on a small strip of clear cellophane, there are hundreds of ways to catch prey unawares and then bring them to an out-of-the-way place to do your business in peace.

Lucas knew about this as he had heard rumors since his research about the campus services and student life during his 9th year, just before he came to attend. He had then been the victim of that type of attack when two of the dorm-mates had spiked his Pepsi so they could toss his room and steal from him. They had attacked his sleeping defenseless body in anger, thus waking him, when they found everything locked in heavy armored trunks and steel furniture he had moved in with, just in case something of the sort occurred. After that event, he had talked with many other young prodigies, mostly from other buildings and different classes than his own to avoid the angry delinquents and their friends. He especially asked the 'prodigy program' girls and young women at large about the rumors and then asked a few who were pharmacology majors if there were any protections available. There was, but at a steep cost most couldn't afford, at least not all year long, every year.

Lucas could afford it easily. He had two separate trust funds from his grand-parents on both sides of the family, he had already started his small company in Buffalo at age 9 before moving to San-
Francisco where he simply opened a small dedicated office with a separate supplemental production facility, both near Stanford campus. He delegated the assembly of the finished products to employees while doing most of the high-price programming contracts by himself under a different hacker's handle: Frankenstein 'The man made of many broken parts' which was a cruelly fitting reality for him. Plus, he had acquired at age 9 the many vast plots of land, houses and companies that came with the Wise Manor Heritage & Trust left behind by his ancestor that was raking in a lot of money. Lucas was far richer than anybody knew but he never bragged or showed off, keeping to modest habits and good quality clothes but in usual cuts and styles that didn't show their worth. He expended a lot on his medical care, surgeries and therapies to heal from the violence of his parents but that was inside his body, or at least under the clothing, and therefore not visible either. Using this phantom wealth for his extended protection and that of a few friends was cheaply paid for the peace of mind he obtained.

Since the teenager had been warned years ago and maintained regular chats with his friends in the pharmacological industry even after their graduations, Lucas was not caught by surprise by the 2018 attempt at drugging him. So, the boy decided to ambush his would-be robbers by taking the antidote and then going to bed to fake being unconscious to catch them in the act. He checked the security cameras he had secretly installed the January before to record pad his reports of theft and vandalism for the campus police or the actual Silicon Valley PD if it came to that again. He set up the cameras to send their recordings to an out-of-country server in the Caiman Islands at his lawyer's second office, just in case the University or the kids' families tried to pressure him into silence again, like the four last times.

(The Rolling Stones – Paint It Black)

No more mister nice Lucas.

Boy was he surprised when the door opened and instead of teenaged thieves it was a twink rapist trying to jump on him in bed to rip off his clothes and molest him. The guy was sure surprised too when his victim wasn't asleep, was in fact fully coherent and aware to identify him, and had the biggest blasted box-cutters he'd ever seen! Lucas had taken the precaution of going to bed with industrial sized box-cutters in both hands and a few more 'defensive' tools secured about his person just in case. He had a bad feeling and the rape statistics for juvenile boys on campus were not in his favor. Large annual parties where there was plenty of booze, pot and young couples going away to dark nooks were a favorite time of predators and Lucas had the bad feeling the stats were catching up to him.

The stats caught up to him indeed; the rapist was even less lucky to get out alive.

The guy's face, hands and chest had been so badly cut he was considered disfigured for life unless he put out over three million dollars worth of plastic and reconstructive surgeries. Just re-attaching his fully severed nose would be about 15 hours of work if it were to happen. Repairing the left eyeball was impossible; he was now blind for life on that side. Both ears were mangled messes that had missing pieces. His throat and vocal chords were badly maimed and would never recover above 40% capacity. One hand was unresponsive for ever and the other was missing the thumb. Then what happened below his beltline, and what he now missed, would haunt him for the rest of his pain-filled life.

The bloodshed had been so bad and noisy that the partiers had to call the police, the ambulances for several cases of shock and two SVPD wagons to haul away the perpetrators and their supporters. It happens the security cameras in the staircase going up to the apartment had captured the scene of the three juvenile thugs getting paid for drugging Lucas and setting him apart so the man could go in to commit the rape undisturbed. The three thugs had essentially pimped out their dorm-mate without
telling him and added insult to the injuries by setting it up like Lucas was a drugged-out floozy who
got into trouble by his own careless idiocy.

The fallout was too much for Stanford to hide, especially with the SVPD and paramedics involved,
on top of the reporters and a horde of kids with camera-enabled smartphones. The families of the
thugs being rich and having some influence, they managed to pull their kids out of the school before
they were officially expelled and two were shipped out of the USA right away to avoid prosecution.
That left Lucas to deal with the legal procedural fallout by himself at the end of the week. And then
his father Lawrence had arrived secretly, after receiving an angry call from the parent of the third
thug because he was in police cells being interrogated. The moron had been caught at the US /
Mexico border crossing, in a stupid Uber car driven by a drunken kid from the same party, of all
things, trying to leave the jurisdiction. Apparently that was a big No-No when you are arraigned for
'conspiracy & accessory to rape' amongst others and his parents were even more pissed because now
the DA would never accept a deal to let their only child get off easy as he was a proven flight risk.

Lucas' father Lawrence didn't care what the story was because he never did and always looked for
the most inane reasons to hurt and beat his son until he was badly injured. And it now had been four
long years since the last time he had put his own hands on the boys' filthy pasty skin. He listened to
the complete case that was showed extensively to him by the county prosecutor, backed by the
videos, vial of drug powder and wads of cash in the three boys' possession at the time. Then the
deprieved father made false smiles, spoke platitudes to the officials and made it look all right in the
best of all worlds. He promptly took Lucas out of the station and to his suite, a 5-star penthouse in
the top of the local Hilton Hotel, and immediately beat the life out of the weak, injured, already
traumatized 14 year old, victimizing him anew despite the risks Lawrence knew this to involve, as
the last time had shown.

The point was simple: the event made Lawrence Wolenczak look bad. It didn't matter that Lucas was
innocent or a victim or had been in danger for his life as the rapist could have killed him when he
was done with him.

Child + call / visit of cops = bad image for parents, always.

Therefore, call / visit of cops = beating for child, always. Period.

Lawrence had always hated his son without restraint but had also begun to fear him because he had
started to fight back against the abuse, going so far as to kill some of the minions Cynthia and himself
had hired to help 'docilify' the boy. That's why Lawrence drugged his son surreptitiously in the
police station to make him amenable and pliable. With the boy drugged out of his mind, he brought
him to the hotel and beat him to the point of bleeding injuries, scarring lesions from whipping him
and multiple broken bones in his legs. Except at the end, the teenager had managed to rally himself
and use a pressurized capsule of acid to injure Lawrence and make him back off. The teenager then
crawled around the hotel's corridor, trying desperately to find help, while Lawrence ran off to find
his own medical help as well as dodge the cops.

Later on, when the police were investigating, they took body surface photos, affidavits and initiated
an investigation of the police station itself to see where and how the kid had been drugged. The
injuries inflicted by Lawrence were so grave that Lucas had to be hospitalized at the Stanford
Campus Clinic for almost four months before being let out on 'light duties' with severe restrictions to
his walking abilities for another whole year after that. Lucas had needed to move around in a
motorized wheelchair for almost ten months and do two months of physiotherapy to relearn to walk
after the violent altercation with his father. The only silver lining in the dreary cloud was that daddy
deardest had not escaped unscathed from the fight.
On top of that, to the vile, criminally defunct bastard's surprise, Stanford University didn't want to even try to silence the situation, not after the mess with the Brock Turner case of 2016 still quite fresh in the collective memory. The families of the delinquents involved were 'cooing' and 'haaawing' at the name and presence of the great and mighty Lawrence Alexander Wolenczak while sneering in contempt at his back. Even the parents of the kids who doped Lucas and set him up to be raped thought Lawrence was a dip-shit father and his son deserved much better.

And, coming full circle back to the subject, THAT was why Lucas had such a large executive office space with such an extravagant private bathroom reserved just for himself attached to it. He needed it to keep himself alive by having fresh medical supplies available and having enough storage for extra clothing to change out of his damaged or bloodied threads when a patch-up was needed. The shower & steam therapy stall was a necessity to deal with the cramps and bruising in his thorax, just like the tub with its Jacuzzi water jets and automated massage rollers were better for the legs and back. Bolted solidly to the wall above the side-by-side washer & dryer was a pull down single bed so he could sleep off the injuries and self-medication. It was designed for all the comfort he could get to fit into the tight, secure space of the bathroom. It had also become his permanent sleeping arrangement ever since it had been built, right then after the violent altercations with the kids and Lawrence.

NOBODY but him ever took care of him, so he bought and kept what he needed to do it right. He had the money, a massive steady yearly income on top of the two trust funds, and he had done several very lucrative contracts for the World Bank's cyber-security department that he had been paid for in Euros and coins across several accounts with different pseudonyms. Lucas had spent the last four years creating, back-stopping and armor-plating seven different alternate identities in case he needed to run away from his father and his many military contacts. Until then, that money was used to splurge on a few select items like his company's office space in a fully secured complex that not even Lawrence could breach.

His landlord was the World Bank and they liked him better than his dad.

Take that, dad! For once, cronyism, gerrymandering, back-room deals and occult alliances had saved his life and health! The office was the only place in his life Lucas felt safe and physically secure. By March 2019 he had moved out of the Brownstone completely, re-routing all physical mail and parcels to his office. Stanford could do nothing about it anymore, not after Lucas had decided to bypass his father and use his own company's lawyers to strong-arm the situation to his liking. Lawrence had been completely flabbergasted that Lucas had actually filmed the beating his parent gave him. The soundtrack of Lawrence berating Lucas that "He should have let himself be raped in silence rather than make a public mess that embarrassed his father in public" clinched it that the kid would no longer be a victim anymore.

Then Lucas pulled out three dozen recordings of similar events since he was five years old.

Strangely enough, Lawrence signed off on Lucas not needing to live in a Stanford appointed building anymore. He also stayed away from his son for almost two whole years. Until now.

Time had made Lawrence harsher, meaner and also bolder in how he showed his contempt towards his only child. He never sent anymore the mandatory "You did well" greeting email when the school report card came in. He stopped sending the small (10$, what a cheapskate!) monetary reward for doing well in his studies on account that he had his own company and no longer needed such a childish display to know he did well.

The threats of beatings if he did badly or misbehaved had been suddenly removed from the conversation and relationship because Lucas always told Lawrence the comms were recorded and sent to a secure server out-of-country each time they spoke. Thus, his father had become more civil,
in a cold detached way, and called far less as well.

Until this noon. What a way to ruin an entire life!

Lawrence had decided to pull a play from the book of the three juvenile thugs that attacked Lucas by pimping him off to some friends. Except instead of cheap sex from a drugged kid, they wanted cheap cyber support that they would be paying Lawrence for, not Lucas himself.

That's right: Lawrence was using the old 'parental authority' card to oblige Lucas to go to some dumb-ass military boat in the ocean depths to serve as their resident 'geek squad' of one. He would be the only teenager aboard and the only person under 21 years of age as that ship had several requirements, like a lot of diplomatic contacts, which needed older, more mature mindsets from the crew and passengers.

SO, Lawrence had decided to illegally write up Lucas as a subordinate inside the World Power Project hierarchy - as a bleepin' Department Director no less! – in order to be the one that bills the UEO Navy and gets the money, not Lucas himself. Also, by using that same law, his dad was absconding his -- supposed -- salary, bonuses and benefits because Lucas was "Too young to handle them responsibly by himself" or so the blasted crud said to the IRS (USA's Internal Revenue Service; the tax collectors)!

SO now Lucas was supposed to just shut the fuck up and get ready to deploy from the drydock at New Cape Quest in south Florida on the 10th of January 2021. OR ELSE daddy would have to come over and show his little kiddie who it was that had the PATERNAL AUTHORITY in the household.

Lucas had two more years at Stanford planned out.

Lucas had business contracts in progress to fulfill.

Lucas wanted to stay a civilian, not become a slave and certainly not a child-soldier.

Lucas most specifically didn't want to be put under the legal guardianship of some white christian bastard to whom Lawrence would give "The full fatherly rights of corporeal dis't'iplinings and corrections as needed to make him workable and agreeable to the eyes of the american christian community". (southern USA accent and contemptuous sarcasm very much expressed)

In other words, Lawrence had found a way, a loophole, in the child protection laws to get back at his son's attempt to escape from the violence in his life. He wanted to use the organized religious bastards that poison American society to do the beatings for him and defend him on top of things. They had BILLIONS of dollars and MILLIONS of worshipers that vote to influence politicians and law-enforcement officers all day long. They had even managed to enshrine in the laws the right to beat and harm children as being 'good christian moral upbringing'. All Lawrence had to do was sign over his parental authority to a church, parochial school or some cockamamie private pastoral tutor and Voila! One teenaged boy back in slavery again!

(Two Steps From Hell – Fearless)

Well no! But oh fucking Hell, no! Not in this life or the next!

It was a well played gambit on his father's part, Lucas had to admit. The man was rabidly atheistic and of jewish ancestry, like Cynthia Holtzenstein, his ex-wife and mother of Lucas, had been. Nobody who knew the man would have ever thought he would go down that avenue. Getting in bed with the WASP (white anglo-saxon protestant) movance in order to cozy up to a church group
enough to trust them with his secrets and then make a sweet deal in a backroom like that…

Yeah, his dad wanted to hurt him plenty now. That much was obvious.

Well, Lucas was not the defenseless little tool-in-the-shed that Lawrence thought. The teenager had seen the writing on the wall all those years ago and then again with the rape case. He had nothing but pain and misery coming from his father, and had to be ready to cut all bridges as soon as the threat was enacted. Since he lived, studied and worked full-time in the office, things actually got easy from now on to the end. He would need to send out wire-transfers to deposit cash in some Western Union branches to wait for pick-up and then reserve a nice sleeper cabin on an Amtrak train up North to the USA's eternal cousin: Canada. Once across the border, he would make a prolonged stop to treat his legs again, then head for the center of the country's landmass where he would find a nice little out-of-the-way village with few permanent residents and fewer tourists. He would settle there on a farmstead until he turned 21 years old or older, then he would use his well earned funds to travel abroad and see the world in person instead of vicariously through a computer screen.

It was a very basic plan, barely the bones and nerves of one, but he had the time and money to do it as well as almost four solid years of preparatory work already done and rearing to go.

If his father and associated minions thought they could enslave him in an army boat of any sorts and take him out to international waters to beat on him and then say "it's international waters, US laws and children's rights don't apply here', then the collective of bastards was in for a rude awakening.

Lucas would use every contact, cybernetic and human, that he could lay hands on and then go hunting for the personal juicy details of each life. Politicians and soldiers all get promotions and higher, more exalted positions in their organizations by many, many means, not a few of which are underhanded and down right criminal. Not a single religious zealot ever got promoted without destroying his rivals and having several depravities of his own in the closet. Lucas planned on finding all of this, agglomerating everything with his father's own crimes and secret deals then publish everything on several servers, especially in countries the USA and UEO can't intimidate.

Can you say "WikiLeaks"?

Russia is such a nice place in summer; China too, come to think of it. It was just Lawrence's bad luck that he forgot how many tongues his son spoke fluently, and what doors can be opened when you show respect for an official and his cultural traditions by speaking his native tongue instead of shoving english down his throat in his own office, in his own government building.

Lucas finished wiping the blood from his face and sprayed some Bactine mist on the small abrasion to seal it cleanly. He undressed out of his clean but modest jeans, t-shirt and flannel shirt ensemble that he chose specifically to hide how much money he had to his own name and started up the shower. He would cleanse himself in the shower with a good scrub and then steep himself like a teabag in the soaker tub with the Jacuzzi set on its softest, most meditative setting, with some therapeutic bath salts made by his own medication company: Wise Apothecary & Chemists Ltd, est. 1808.

After taking care of his spastic, cramped body and aching head, he would order in a new, better, hot meal and get on the Internex to start playing his pieces on the newly established gameboard.

Check, Lawrence; your move.

Filial enmity resurgent

(Two Steps From Hell – Never Back Down)
Lucas sat at his desk, humming along the excellent epic melody of Two Steps From Hell as it played in the background. The theme was quite ‘À propos’, too. He had spent the evening going through his MP3 music collection to compile everything in proper order, again, and load it into the large, and heavily modified, LG Stylo V smartphone (‘Tech Support’ edition) that was his Go To device for most of his personal activities online and storing securely a few knickknacks he didn't want on a company machine. His custom-built laptop workstation, a ten pounds, 21 inches wide monster in charcoal gray casing made to look older and more worn out than it actually was, sat in his armored titanium briefcase along with his bank cards, cash in US dollars, Canadian dollars, Euros and physical bronze-colored coins. All the cash was in certified US Postal / Canada Post envelopes with paperwork certifying he needed it to spend on his business trip to set up a new office and production workshop in Vancouver. Since he actually had six consoles and varied cyber equipments sold and working in the area, the story was credible. He might even do it for real as the potential for profit was real too.

A small flat felt pouch would stay in its hiding space in the waistline of his clean-cut dark brown khaki trousers. The pouch was a personal joke and throwback to his family's jewish ancestry back in the old european countries before the 1800's when his forebears had the vision to emigrate to the USA while the European monarchs' incessant wars were on hold for a while. This pouch contained individual, natural raw unmarked gemstones, just like his far away ancestors used to cut and polish in the jewelry stores of Prague. These were universal currency in every culture on Earth and completely untraceable. It would demand a lot of haggling and bartering to use them but the diminutive packet contained twenty assorted gems of 2 full carats each just in case he needed to go off-the-grids in a bad way.

Better to have and not use than to desperately need and not have available. Especially on the run.

(Two Steps From Hell – Victory)

A bleep from his console told him his lawyer had received the messages from last night and was processing them. It could take a few hours but it would get done. Then the fun would begin. Lawrence wasn't the only one who could find large well funded groups to influence lawmakers and police officers across the planet. Children's rights and child protection had two very big allies in the USA and Lucas would use them both to good effect.

Enter the game, the new pieces: The California DCFS and the ACLU.

Each state and the federal government of America had their section of the 'Department of Children and Family Services' whose jobs were about as self-evident as the name of the organization.

The other one, that was a real wild card of its own. The 'American Civil Liberties Union' had long been a thorn in the side of crooked politicians, tyrannical police officers and cult gurus all over the USA. There was nobody that was exempt from their acerbic skeptical perusal or the vitriolic lambasting that would follow if they were indeed trying to abuse trust, hurt people or exploit the poor and defenseless.

Lucas may not be poor and completely defenseless, but he was 1) a child, and 2) a child victimized repeatedly by his mother, father and their assorted cronies. He had the emails, films and telephone conversations recorded accumulated over 13 years to prove it all.
Three guesses which way those organizations would lean, and the first two don't count. Eh, eh, eh!

(Europe – The Final Countdown)

Lucas leaned backwards into the sinfully padded backrest of his chair and contemplated the reply he had just received from Amtrak about his reservation. His booking a 1st class sleeper cabin on a train meant he got a quick response. Having used an international 'Visa Black - Executive VIP' credit card emitted by a Swiss bank in Geneva had opened doors that the average little 15 year old could only dream about but never reach. Lucas wasn't average and his own steady cash flow meant he could indeed reach his goals and his dreams too, if he made an effort.

The train company was 'happy' to receive him and fully aware he was a minor traveling solo abroad for his business needs. The packet of information he had sent Amtrak last evening had been vetted and his identity, the real one at this point of the plan, was accepted without any hiccups. He would have a nice enclosed cabin with en-suite bathroom. According to the reply, he would have a wide double bed, small desk and small table with two chairs for private two-person dining in peace and comfort. The room had its own mini fridge, coffee maker, micro-wave oven and, incredible luxury, a small wood burning stove that lit and heated the room but also had a flat top to heat food for a more romantic experience for those who took their train-borne vacations seriously.

Lucas really wanted to travel more after reading that! It certainly wasn't this morning's cheap frozen flatbread, egg, sausage and cheese sandwich that he heated in the micro-wave and took all of five bites to gobble up that counted as either refined or romantic experience. Humph! He needed to take more care of his body and his mind if he wanted to avoid becoming depressive and self-destructive like Lawrence kept trying to make happen.

The young man stood up and walked over to the tall coat rack next to the bathroom door. He had dressed in matched all-black underwear, and would compliment the brown khakis he wore with a solid brown flannel shirt that matched as well. A pair of brown & beige mid-calf high hiking boots, brown leather belt and a pair of decorative brown leather bracers would accessorize the lot. He would look like a young, cool, well dressed teenage entrepreneur who came to Vancouver both for the business opportunities and the end-of-year celebrations. The good part of using his real identity to cross the border meant he could explain his high-priced train ride and a good hotel as being his 'sweet sixteen' presents to himself before getting serious about searching out office space and setting his company firmly in place.

Lucas smiled a nasty little smirk as he took out his flat wallet that contained his cards and identity papers. Opening it, he read anew the formal licenses and permits he had accumulated over the years, most of which his father had no idea. He had licenses for driving a moped (California, age 14), a car or pickup (New Mexico, age 15), a snowmobile (California, age 14), a 4-wheeler (New Mexico, age 14) and several licenses for small propeller plane (California, age 12) and motorboat (California, age 12).

(Two Steps From Hell – Never Back Down)

The one that would give Lawrence nightmares was the nifty little gun license. He obtained it at the age of 14, right after the attempted rape. It was then that Lucas started reacting seriously to the threats posed by his dorm-mates, even those that just stayed silent and apathetic, and his father. So, he found a family-friendly gun club and asked one of the Silicon Valley PD agents assigned to his rape case to sign him a reference letter to show the club admins' that he had a valid reason to want to use guns for self-defense. He therefore learned to shoot a variety of revolvers, pistols and long rifles. He even got to shoot off a few models of crossbows during an exhibition of novelties by the club's shop. Thanks to the last two years and occasional trips to the shooting range despite all the mobility troubles the
wheelchair caused, Lucas could say that he was comfortable with and favored the bolt action rifles and the small but practical Derringer-type pistols like those of North American Arms, American Derringer Company or Cobra Arms. He felt the most comfortable with a small cal.22 holding 4 to 8 shots, be it revolver or semi-auto. His needs were for self-defense, not large game hunting or proving the size of his manhood, unlike other teenaged boys with gun licenses.

Despite the permit, he couldn't legally own a gun unless it was bought for him and given to him by an adult in his direct family. He had asked his lawyer if the man could purchase the weapon then sell it to Lucas but no; that was a big risk in his circumstance. With his companies, 2 trust funds and several million dollars worth of contracts, even the least little bit of an impropriety could tempt somebody at the California District Attorney's office to lay charges, if only to strong-arm Lucas into offering up some cash for his electoral campaign to buy peace with the bastard.

Besides, any weapon bought in the USA would have to go through the Canadian customs and would probably be seized. Better to find a way to buy the needed gear across the line when he got there then getting bounced back at the crossing post. Plus, at this point, there was little proof that Lawrence could bypass the layers of defenses that his son was setting up in such a way as to force the young man to go off-grid and hide in the deep dark segments of society. Not yet, anyways. Although, if pressed, the boy was easily able do so and would not look back when he did.

It all depended on just how pissed off Lawrence would be, and how much money and contacts he would be forced to burn to stay out of jail or even just keep his place as the Chairman and Lead Scientist of WPP. Hopefully, he'd burn through a lot and have nothing left to spend on getting back at Lucas before the kid turned 21 years old in peace. If not, then Lucas would do like the SeaQuest where his dad wanted to send him off to: go dark, deep and silent, and then shove a 10 megaton warhead up his backside from out of nowhere. The boy might be a hard-core civilian and pretty much a pacifist when left unharmed, but he could run a stealth attack on the enemy just as well as anybody whose life, freedom and dignity were threatened by armed criminal forces.

(Two Steps From Hell – Wolf King)

The young man took another look at his clothes, waiting for him on the coat rack, and sat back at his desk. He had a long day ahead of him and many things to clear up before his train left at 22:00pm this evening. Yes, he had opted for the soonest, quickest departure allowed by his choice of cabin and luxury. If they had told him next week, he would have accepted it, but they had the choice as there were three trains every week that left for the Canadian Rockies equipped for luxury vacationers. Why set it back to later when his entire personal life could fit in one large wheeled trunk, a carry-on bag and an aluminum briefcase?

Now, all he had to do was to upload some files and incriminating videos to an out-of-country server and set a timer to download them to the appropriate persons on Monday morning of next week when he would be across the border and out of jurisdiction. Then a series of pre-written letters and forms going to some fourteen agencies and organizations about why he felt it necessary to turn his back on his birth country and seek refuge up north.

After the legal maneuvers were on their merry way, he looked over the itineraries for the many long-haul 18-wheel trucks that left from the Wolenbahn Stanford Manufacturing Plant, the Wolenbahn Buffalo production lines and the Wolenbahn Ramshackle House workshop in New York city. The private train convoy from the Bramble Manor facilities in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near the Mount Auburn Hospital complex right on the side of the Charles River, would take time to be loaded and then reach its destination, even by using older, less traveled railways in the more rural areas of America. The vintage executive floatplane had been ordered from the San Francisco harbor back to the Wise Manor in Buffalo and would stay there until it was called to serve, which could take many
months as he didn't want to risk that particular asset during a possible firefight.

The next hour was passed reading and signing off on the remaining reports and orders for the other medication production or shipment facilities owned and operated by Wise Apothecary & Chemists Ltd in Detroit (Michigan), Sarnia (Ontario), Sault Sainte-Marie (Michigan & Ontario), Copper Harbor (Michigan), Clough Island near Duluth (Wisconsin) and Mission Island in Thunder Bay (Ontario). Everything was centered around the Three Great Lakes in the middle of the continent as the company had been built in the early 1800's when only horse carriages and sail boats had been available to move goods and people around. And for large freight, river boats and canal barges were the only logical solution until the advent of steam engines to power larger boats and then trains but the railways took many decades to establish. Far longer than the owners of the company had been willing to wait at the time.

Finally, with all the movements of vehicles and cargo arranged and confirmed, he printed out his last bureaucratic preparations of this morning before he got on the vid-phone with his lawyer: the forms to ask the Canadian government asylum and official refugee status pending the review of his formal emergency immigration request. Just in case it was needed…

Placing pieces on the gameboard
(Frederich Chopin – Funeral March)

Tuesday 15th of December, 2020; 11:22am
Wolenbahn Inc, office of Lucas Wolenczak, president
San-Francisco, California, USA

Well, that was that, done and dealt with.

The lawyer confirmed for him that Lawrence had indeed registered him as an employee of WPP as a full-fledged service director in the IT department and the fool even had the gumption to backdate it to two years ago. His dad was so stupid that he had processed all the back-pay and benefits as well but had made two critical mistakes in his attempt at deception which showed he wasn't receiving any outside help from criminal pros at this point.

ONE; he didn't process all the IRS paperwork and back-taxes for the salary and performance bonuses that he claimed his son had earned in those two years. Now what would that count as? Oh, yes… Tax fraud, logging false contracts with the UEO Government and identity theft just for starters…

TWO; he took the cash into his own personal bank account, not an escrow account or the two trust funds established by the grand-parents or even a new trust fund as would be the normal procedure in such cases. His attorney told him that the laws of several countries, led by the USA actually, had been modified to prevent under-aged professionals from being defrauded or stolen from by the adults in charge of their job performances. The movement had been led by the music and performing arts industry as that was the biggest population of juveniles that earned the most hard money and where the worst parental and agency frauds happened. Then it was the sports leagues that went after the parent-coaches who controlled and defrauded the salaries and pensions of the young athletes in the college leagues and National leagues. There too, a lot of hard cash went around and a lot of adults thought it was theirs to use, not the kids, despite it being the young people who were on the field playing the games or doing the pretty-pony routine in the boardrooms of international companies to earn big-money sponsorship contracts.
According to his lawyer, Lucas had a very good chance at suing Lawrence for identity fraud and attempting to include his son in his conspiracy to defraud the IRS and WPP. If, by some miracle of Darkness, Lawrence managed to find a judge corrupt enough to dismiss those charges, then he was setting himself up instead for a suit for stealing the wages and benefits from his son. On top of which, the lawyer would help Lucas properly register with the tradesmen unions that controlled the workforce on-site at WPP. They would make a deal with the white-collar syndicates and blue-collar labor unions to back them up in their suit against Lawrence on grounds of having broken labor conventions by having tried to hire outside the pool of unionized members as he was bound by law, having attempted to steal the union dues instead of paying them out when he took control of Lucas’ financials, etc…

The idiot parent had hung himself from the left, right and center all in one go.

Lucas almost felt sorry for the incompetent adult but, after what he had suffered from him in injuries, demeanment and emotional traumas over the years, pity was in short supply all of a sudden. Let the dumb crud express violently his mid-life crisis and insecurities about his manhood to a judge in open court, in front of jurors and media, and see what that got him for a change!

No, Lucas wasn’t going to hold back his retaliations anymore. During the conversation he had told his attorney quite clearly to notify the IRS, the Federal and California DCFS, the bank where the salary's money was transiting in order to recall the funds and put them in judicial escrow, then liaise with all the unions he should be a member of to work at WPP in his multiple capacities. On top of that, Lucas told his lawyer to contact the UEO departments in charge of Justice, Military Security and the World Financial Market Authority that watched over the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and planetary money movements as they were the ones in charge of the WPP's cash reserves and employee benefits management and pension funds.

There would be a lot of dogs-of-war barking rabidly against his dear father's stinking hide come Friday morning, and it would get worse from there on.

After all, the World Power Plant was located on the Western Coast of the African continent, and the countries that compose the Pan-African Confederation would want a piece of the action, just like the members of the European Union which was the second biggest financial backer of WPP at a whooppin 25% of the startup cash after the UEO Alliance (UEO 50%; EU 25%; PAC 15%; AtlC 10%).

Those two confederations stood to lose several tens of billions of Euros if the whole project tanked out because one measly functionary was using his posting to defend his great and mighty image of what he believed was his adult manliness against his poor beleaguered teenaged son. Not to mention the loss of reputation, credibility and capacity to control their own people inside their own organizations when it became public just how big a clusterfuck Lawrence had made of his position at the top.

Chuckling darkly at the gallows humor of the situation, Lucas wondered if his father would ever realize that by trying so desperately to demonstrate his penultimate control over his boy’s life, that he had in fact proven the exact opposite. He had proven that he himself was out of control, disconnected with reality and completely incapable of differentiating between his wants, rights and legal limits anymore.

Well, with around thirty foreign governments hunting him down for a piece of his oily hide, maybe he’d wise up at some point, but Lucas wouldn’t hold his breath for it. His evaluation of the situation was that Lawrence was a bad job done and he needed to start actively cutting his losses where that bastard was concerned. In the end of things, the broken-souled teenager was just glad his poor grand-
parents had reached peace before they could witness the shameful acts of their son and be brought low by his depravities as it would certainly splash around the entire family and spare none.

With a great sigh of resignation, Lucas took the paper printout on his desk; one of two sets of forms his lawyer sent over as PDF's to read, fill out and file with him before leaving tonight. The thickest and most important was the dual request for the severing of filial ties and parental authority against Lawrence coupled with the request for legal juvenile emancipation. Both would be arbitrated in full family court by his attorney and the DCFS people against Lawrence and his church cronies, if any of them dared to show up to contest the requests, thus exposing them to public scrutiny. The second set of papers was thinner but foresaw the coming of many, many more in the near future. It was the official request to the Canadian government for the obtention of bi-national USA-Canada citizenship followed by the application for status as legal 'investor immigrant' so he could obtain permanent residency rights and protection inside of Canada without the time limits imposed by a foreign worker's visa or other types oftransitory passage agreements.

Moving not only his business but his entire life up North was a big step but he had been thinking about it for a long time already. Officially, as the Law stood, he was legally domiciled at his father's house in Buffalo, New York State, even though he had never set foot in the place in his entire life, and simply a boarding student at Stanford, San Francisco, California. As Lucas had never moved his permanent residence or place of legal housing to Stanford or San Francisco in any ways, it would look in the papers as if he were migrating from Buffalo directly. And that could actually help, when he proved he had never been housed directly in the same building as his felonious father.

This just left the reaction of his mother to worry about.

And there was no way he would expose himself to that train wreck in progress anymore, no sirree! Leaving Cynthia Holtzenstein in the past had been hard but necessary for his survival. The woman was like a bad addiction to opioids; getting weaned off had almost killed him but staying in contact would kill him just as surely, just a lot more slowly, more violently and leave a bigger mess. No; his mother was a bad person in herself, to which was added the fact her choice of men usually turned around the mental profile that Lawrence had. And his father was actually amongst the least violent, least criminalized she had been implicated with in her life to date.

Hint: criminal attorneys should NEVER date their clients; it will never end well for the kids if there are any as a result of the relationship.

(Alice Cooper – Poison)

Cynthia was a criminal law defender that specialized in dealing with white-collar information thieves, extortionists, black-mailers and financial scammers. Rich guys who scam the IRS and have offshore foundations (Daddy dearest) were her daily bread and served as her bed-warmers by default when she didn't get her chosen quarry. When she didn't have a full roster of stand-alone criminals to represent, she dabbled in defending the mafia; organized crime Bosses liked her like moths were attracted to a sugar-scented candle's flame. Cynthia had represented in her twenty year career to date some seven 'Dons' of the New York State, Vermont and Massachusetts area. She had handled the case of a few guys from Maine that had trouble in NYS's capital in Albany when their attempt to corrupt the state's Secretary of Justice had backfired and they were caught in the act by the security cameras the man had placed inside the office itself.

Damn, but the gal was courting trouble! She was attracted to men of power and authority, those who had just the right 'Bad Boy' attitude and scent of seediness to get her desire for danger and adrenaline rush going. Not that she would ever get into the dangerous situation herself; her style was to wait patiently at home, listen to the man's heroic stories of his nefarious deeds and then 'reward' the guy
sexually in proportion to how big an effect his retelling had on her hormones.

Some girls just liked ponies, others thought they were little princesses like daddy told them when they were young and some others never really grew up from the fantasy world of their childhood and always pined after the great conquering hero to come sweep them off their feet. His mother's psychological profile was all of these put together, and then some. That explained her ownership of a horse farm in Vermont's forested mountains and her regular attendance at medieval fairs and renaissance parties where she always went costumed as - what else? - The beautiful, delicate, demure princess who needed her big strong warlord to come save her...

Lucas wanted to gag when he thought about some of the stuff he had seen and lived from his mother's few years of actual presence in his life. The time, when he was seven years old, when she had forced him to do like a real little page-boy in a great medieval castle by dressing in costume, then staying stiff and silent with a basket of towels and toiletries in his arms right next to the bed where she was shagging vigorously the winner of the Autumn Fair's jousting tourney was engraved in his mind for the rest of his life.

That this event was actually one of the least dangerous and least damaging situations he had endured because of her princess & hero fetish was a complete nightmare that he needed to find a way past at some point. The therapist he had begun consulting since the attempted rape two years ago had done some headway, but there was a limit to how much manure the poor girl could remove from his mind unless she started living in the same house 24/7. And as much as he like her, the 29 year old wasn't his type or in the same league. She was far too much San-Fran harbor hippie for his tastes, thank you very much.

Looking at the clock face built into the desk's surface, Lucas picked up the office's corded telephone set to order himself a very light lunch that he could eat one handed for the most part. Giving the gimlet eye to the piles of paper waiting for his manual TLC, the teen wondered if his lawyer wasn't out to get a piece of his juvenile hide too… Given his luck with the adults in his life, it wouldn't surprise him…

Lawyers are humans too; I have proof, I tell you!

(Twisted Sister – We're not gonna take it anymore!)

Tuesday 15th of December, 2020; 15:07pm

Office of Carmello Giorgio Campanello di Sovorone, esq.; attorney at law

San-Francisco, California, USA

The older Italian gentleman smirked through his thick bushy mustache at the delicate (snobby) mannerisms of his youngest, most prolific corporate client that he still actively represented. Most of those in Lucas' financial and social level were elderly, like the lawyer himself, and already enjoying retirement in the sunnier countries of the planet on long-winded life renewal cruises. Usually without any spouse to hinder them as those had been dropped out of their lives just before pushing their assets out of US jurisdiction and getting a divorce through a friendly, well rewarded judge. And those were easy to find in North America, if you had the connections, money and time to spare to look in the right places.

The 79 year old Sicilian had immigrated to the USA with his parents just at the onset of Mussolinism in Italy's central districts, while the going was possible as the black shirts didn't control the whole country yet. Then, after spending most of his youth in the poorer districts of New York City and the New Jersey Coastal towns, doing small errands for local Famiglia, he had hit it rich by saving the life
of a small child from a sexual predator who tried to abduct the small boy from a park. It was the first-
born son of a Don, the heir and only child of a Famiglia in Jersey.

The Don was implacable in his cruelty against the pervert but truly generous towards the young 17
year old who saved his son. He paid the boy's education in Law at Harvard, along with a generous
living allowance, then Carmello worked for him about 13 years before getting married and moving to
San Francisco because his wife wanted to be close to her ailing mother. The Don, still alive and in
charge, had approved the desire to take care of family and blessed the move by giving him a set of
referrals to local people in need of good reps in court to start up his clientele base. The young man
had therefore been involved with the legal aspects of Famiglia and Mafia in the personal, corporate
and criminal aspects all of his life. He had set up marriage contracts, testaments, heredity charts, trust
funds, family foundations in the USA and offshore, set up corporations both legal and dummies,
fought the IRS and Bureau of Incorporations, etc… A few times he had done the basic research and
evidentiary vetting for criminal cases but he had never pleaded in criminal courts. He presented
himself in a police station only to get the paperwork or post bail for the client when the actual
criminal litigator of record wasn't readily available.

With his white but deeply tanned skin tone, ivory white hair, brows and gallic-style handlebar
mustache, all mounted on a heavy muscular frame of six feet and three inches of some 240 pounds,
the man made an impressive figure anywhere he went, despite being wheelchair bound for years. He
had a rolodex of contacts that held so many 'Bad Boys' that Cynthia would wet herself just thinking
about it, before she even laid eyes on the cards. His much more secret list of 'Go To' people in the
judicial apparatus of the USA, Canada and Mexico was even more carefully guarded and many a
person in the american Homeland Security Department dreaded the day it would come to light as
their names and the favors they owed him were written in there. Corruption was a science, a craft
and an art form; he excelled at it all.

In honesty, Carmello shouldn't have accepted Lucas as a client six years ago when he came to San-
Francisco and set up his lodgings and company's secondary office in town. However, he had
references from back home. The grandson of his old Don had known Lucas through the interactions
of his father and older brothers with Cynthia as their attorney. He had taken pity on the poor kid who
was half his age but forced to endure stuff from his parents that even their 'Made Men' didn't deal
with in the back alleys at night during their enforcement jobs. The teenager had contacted his grand-
father's old friend and ally to ask him if there was anything to be done for Lucas and so, without ever
becoming involved or truthfully aware of just who had helped him, the Wolenczak boy had been
allowed to move his person, life and company to Stanford where he started a new, much healthier
part of his life.

Or so it seemed from the outside.

Carmello's blood boiled when he thought of the hot-wet-cunted bitch in heat that was his mother.
And don't get him started on his father! Carmello had been raised in the old days, when a slap in the
face or a switching on bare arse was normal. He didn't disavow corporal punishment but he certainly
didn't think what Lucas had endured from his mother's bed-pets or his father's angry, out of control
rages was anything related to discipline or valid physical intervention. Even in his youth, Cynthia
would have been known as an amoral floozy and Lawrence an ill-bred mannerless cad. The fact
Cynthia relinquished her parental rights so rapidly 6 years ago had been helped along by a few
contacts back in New York State that still owed him a few considerations, even if Lawrence thought
it was the secret deal he struck with the woman that had caused this. What the man didn't know
would only hurt him that much worse later on and it was a good thing according to the elderly
gentleman.

Lucas had never been told the nitty-gritty details but he had diligently repaid the help he got by
running the numbers and crunching the data streams to validate the positions a few of Carmello's clients had taken against the IRS or their spouse's divorce attorneys about the assets to be split between the parties. Since the boy had managed to get him four clean unilateral wins and almost two dozen partial but very favorable agreements, he had certainly paid off his lawyer's time and efforts on his behalf quite nicely. The large payments his clients gave him were certainly not for losses or dissatisfaction, that was sure!

The elder gentleman smiled again as his youthful guest sipped delicately, almost demurely, from the small cup of strong espresso while reading over the finalized version of the paperwork to be submitted to the Canadian Border & Customs services for his immigration & citizenship applications. The all brown and beige clothing was a very different look from his usual dark blue denim jeans and checkered shirts. Carmello thought he had chosen a good appearance to pass the train line's people and the border guards would treat him a bit better than if he were dressed in his normal old, rumpled and washed out clothes. The boy's instinct in using his true ID and credentials to pass the lines was spot on and using his company's need to expand to support his clients in Vancouver was a stroke of genius. The authorities could uncover and punish a lie, but against the truth the police and ICE would be powerless to stop his passage.

A small snort of amusement brought the venerable lawyer's attention to his youngest client on retainer and he raised his eyebrows in the universal gesture to indicate a silent interrogation. Lucas peered at him over the top of the sheets and smirked at the older man's gall at submitting this in writing for public records.

"Four years of Trump as president was a catastrophe and the onset of another term is making me move up north to protect what's left of my personal dignity? Are you freaking serious, man?" the teen asked incredulously as the older gentleman's own smile widened enough to show teeth.

"Well, he did spit contemptuously on New York values and San-Fran hippies and such… And you have both in your family and business. On top of that, if you want to burn the bridges with the old WASP neo-cons in DC at the Pentagon to break away from your father's sphere of influence, dissing the Commander-in-Chief and making him publicly spit on your name will do that, and then some." The old litigator pointed at the sheets in the boy's hand and continued "Don't forget that this will blow up in old Lawwy's face too! He'll have a Hellavu time convincing the people in DC and the Capitol that he's not secretly against their pony who won them the race both times around. And these bastards have proven themselves to be even more vengeful and quarrelsome than they are racist, bigoted and close-minded! Nah, your daddy's gonna be in the hot seat for that one for a looong time to come; trust me on this."

Lucas just shook his head in despondent disbelief while also secretly thinking the man was probably more right than he knew. From what transpired in the news networks nationally, even Fox News and the normally 'right-of-center but still mainstream' media had rapidly developed a distaste for the Trump-style of public management where everything was turned into a personal, one-on-one contest of will and machismo with each and every bureaucrat, agent, elected official or ambassador, domestically or abroad. The number of emigrants flowing out of the US in the last year alone was staggering in that fully half had stated that the Trump-team presidency had been the fundamental reason for their decision to move out of America. In that way at least, Lucas wouldn't look too much out of place.

"Is there anything else that I need to secure Wolenbahn Electronics against my parents?" the child asked the older man. His greatest fear was losing his life's work, seeing his patents and intellectual property be sold off to finance Lawrence's vendetta against him at some point.

Carmello shook his head negatively and responded firmly "When you transferred a part of the legal
ownership of the company between the two trust funds set up by your grand-parents and kept only 10% of the class-A voting stocks in your own name, you essentially blocked any attempt at taking over the corporation by anybody. Since you are the sole beneficiary of both trusts and they cannot be dissolved for cash-out before you turn 25 years old; any argument made that you put your assets and future in danger by the maneuver are self-evidently false and would bounce off the DCFS and family courts like bugs off the windshield of a car. There is nothing your parents or any church-associated cronies of theirs can do to either seize the assets or obtain any sort of purview over these trusts.

The stately male took a small sip from his minuscule espresso cup and savored the rich, deep flavor before continuing his reply. "The rest of the liquid assets in your own name have been pooled to a bank in Geneva, Switzerland, before splitting them again between Wolenbahn Electronics and the other anonymous Swiss, German, French and British numbered incorporations we have created in the last four years in preparation for this moment. About 40% of your wealth is still in Wolenbahn while the rest was split in 15% blocks and spread in the other shell companies as requested. There is nothing of yours in Canada to physically trace you with, everything will be cash-in-hand or done by wire-transfer as you asked."

Lucas finished signing the sheets in the appropriate places and placed them in their respective envelopes before standing up, hand extended for a last farewell. It would be many years before they saw each other again, even by vid-phone, and given the age and health that Carmello had these days, it could very well be the last time all together.

"I was happy to make your acquaintance, sir, and to work with you on so many projects. You taught me a lot in the six years that we knew each other and I will remember you fondly." Lucas said with a small shy smile as he shook hands with the elder male. Carmello nodded in appreciation of the youth's gratitude, spoken plainly but felt deeply as was the way with the teen. He had a habit of keeping his shields up and tall thick walls around his soul and mind; good habits, given how the world worked for those who saw the deeper, darker truths of life.

The lawyer leaned backwards, making the leather of his wheelchair creak and strain under his girth as he was shaken by a wet, phlegmy cough. It wouldn't be long now, his doctors had confirmed. In a few months, at the end of spring 2021 at the most, he would join his beloved Marianna in the arms of the Lord and be redeemed for his sins. He calmed his breathing and massaged his chest slowly as he watched the carefully neutral, professionally detached expression wash over the face of his youngest client and nodded one last time at him to go. The road was calling to the child and there was nothing to do for Carmello anymore that human medicine wasn't already doing.

Taking his large armored briefcase, Lucas walked out of the luxurious, high-class office for the last time of his life. He knew deep inside that they would never meet again in this life and he could not afford to come back to pay respects at a funeral lest he place himself in Lawrence's grip again. Any gestures of remembrance would have to be done privately or when he had passed 25 years of age and taken hold of his life against all comers.

"Au revoir, mon vieil ami, on se reverra dans un meilleur monde." Lucas thought somberly as he walked out of the building, accompanied by the tapping noise of the can he needed to use on long distances, then into the long black limousine he had rented for the day to ferry him around town in peace and comfort. He had the means, why not use them? Now, all he had to do was some last minute shopping then going to San-Fran's central Amtrak station where the train line had scheduled an executive assistant to meet him. The person would do a final vetting of his identity and baggage then take him to the VIP luxury lounge for a nice, last meal aground before boarding the train for a late evening departure around 22:00pm if all went well with the locomotives and passenger cars.

Last call! All aboard!
The young woman had white skin, brown hair, green eyes and a soft, gentle demeanor common to those who work in hospitality and customer service around the world. She nodded towards Lucas but didn't extend a hand as that was inappropriate given her job and their differing stations in life, with hers being much beneath the paying passenger's position. Lucas didn't agree with the psychology of the situation but understood the protocols and reality of money well enough to not insist or be overly friendly with someone whom he would have beside him for about 15 minutes before they separated and never met again in this life. This type of snobbery bothered the gentle boy but it was pointless for him to fight it when all of society across the planet thought the same way.

Plastering on his face his best, most polite corporate owner's smile and demeanor, he inclined his head minutely and waited until the car's trunk was opened so the exec could take a tally of his heavy baggage and call out a porter with a dolly to lug it all inside to the warehouse to await loading onto the baggage car when it was positioned. Lucas would only have to check his briefcase and carry-on shoulder bag that held his clothes and toiletries for the trip itself. All his other clothes and extended personal belongings, which weren't that numerous in fact, were all stored in the wheeled trunk in the car's back. His more important tools, books, electronics parts and two backup computers had already been shipped out by UPS overland trucking last evening before he went to bed. Those two heavy wheeled trunks would be waiting for him in Vancouver's UPS depot for pickup when he got there.

Smiling emptily at all the right places and times, the teenager kept an attentive but silent attitude with the executive all the way from the car to the VIP embarkation counter where she placed him in the hands of the US Customs agents for processing then disappeared back into the depths of the terminal. Lucas couldn't care less about the unknown woman, despite her friendly nature. The moment he scanned his passport and ID cards into the Immigration & Customs Enforcement system, it would ping around the country and the people who watched his dad, and his supposed 'interests', would be notified. The only good part of this was that he was moving well passed the usual business hours and had reserved the ticket under the name of his company, Wolenbahn Electronics International Inc, thus making certain that even fewer people would make the link with the family's rare eastern european name.

The customs agents were bored out of their minds as most people coming aboard, even the VIP's, were not planning on leaving US soil so they had plenty of time to talk with the little blond guy and process his paperwork at a leisurely pace. A few smiles, platitudes and a wave later, and Lucas was
hobbling through the gate and into the waiting area for fine dining, a large TV showing CNN to the room at large and free wi-fi. There were some cushy lazy-boys spread between the large five-seat sofas and coffee tables and a doorway in the far side of the room held a sign that spelled out the name of the restaurant / lounge where the food was. Deciding he did have the time and appetite, the young male aimed his slow moving frame towards the restaurant so he could feed himself something better than his usual fare of neighborhood diner order-in meals.

Lucas appreciated the very plush, velvety five star setting and menus; it was really high-end VIP as promised. He took his time by firstly ordering a chilled pitcher of lemonade and some garlic bread au gratin to nibble on while he perused the menu. He had a good two and a half hour to eat in peace before boarding, he wanted to enjoy this experience fully on the off chance it went pear shaped on him.

Having finally selected something from the Host's Table in the menu, he ordered a decadent meal of surf & turf composed of braised sirloin steak (real beef – what a decadent treat!), grilled turkey breast, three large pan-seared scallops wrapped in bacon and three large scampi shrimp. The plate came with the usual sides of potatoes at choice, steamed vegetables, rice and coleslaw. All the sides were in small quantities, more to give some variety than to create a massive quantity. The adolescent was surprised that a train station, even a VIP one, would have the ability to serve red meat in this epoch of USA politics, given that the industrial production of such had been banned since before he was born in the mid 1990's. The waiter explained that the meat was actually from a local dairy farm that needed to slaughter its animals when they no longer produced milk anymore so the foodstuff was actually seasonal and still in very limited quantity. Also, despite the price on the item, it went off fast as their clientele was the social stratum that did have the finances to afford it easily, especially on vacations or business travels since those were tax deductible corporate expenses.

Taking his own sweet time to eat, he managed to clean out everything thus amazing the waiter who wondered out loud where the thin, lightweight boy had stowed it all. Lucas smirked in return and asked for the dessert menu; he didn't have any space left, not really, but he wanted to goad the waiter a bit and if he did find something he liked, he'd ask if he could have some to go aboard the train. Being in the VIP passengers and having a sleeper cabin with its own fridge surely had some privileges, no?

From the dessert card he chose himself a non-alcoholic irish coffee and decided that he did in fact still have room for a little solid food so he chose a luxurious five layered chocolate and wild berries cake topped with mint ice-cream and french vanilla whipped cream. The waiter's dubious glance was amusing, as was his flabbergasted expression when Lucas methodically ate his way through the sinful baked confection relentlessly.

When the young man brought him the check, the teenager couldn't help the playful chuckle that escaped him. "I have a very quick, very demanding metabolism." He quipped at the male server while sliding his credit card in the wireless machine to pay his meal. The man shook his head and grumped good-naturedly at the bottomless pits inside teenagers and bemoaned that his cute, gentle little girl was gonna be like that in less than four years. He wasn't getting any sympathy on that one from Lucas: "You had a kid cuz you wanted it; live with it. She certainly didn't ask for you either." The teen thought silently as he slowly, painfully, stood from the booth to trudge his way to the boarding area.

Barely two minutes later, the boarding warning light came on and a voice sounded out of the waiting zone speakers, calling to all passengers and train crew to prepare for departure in thirty minutes.

(Scorpions – Wind of Change)
A different executive assistant waved at Lucas to come by her side and she showed him a sheet of paper with his picture and credentials listed on it. Her job was to show him to his cabin aboard the train and introduce him to the stewards so they could know him and his needs. Unspoken went the underlying message that it was to warn them he was a minor traveling unaccompanied and he needed some basic surveillance, from afar and discretely given it was HIS company that paid the tickets and HIS opinion that would be in the customer reviews that the line's client satisfaction department would write in the reports.

The cabin was exactly as luxurious and spacious as advertised. The small appliances were all built into smooth dark wood cabinets with open faces. There were a few open shelves to stow the basics of traveling in a cabin for a prolonged duration like pajamas, towels, toiletries and such. There were small nightstands on each side of the bed for more personal items. The small wood burning stove had two glass sides and was actually set into the wall with the bathroom so you had light, heat and a small cooktop on each side. Ideal for soaking in the tub while keeping hot your chocolate, tea or coffee.

Lucas sat on the wide cedar wood chest/bench at the foot of the king-size bed, keeping a politely neutral face while the stewards explained the basic rules of using the cabin and appliances, especially the fireplace. The fridge had a basic setup of drinks in retail bottles, condiments for hot beverages and a few things to fix up to his taste the snacks he could buy in the dining car and bring back to his cabin if he preferred to eat privately. Also, all sleeper VIP passengers could simply ring the stewards to place an order in person or use the brand new touchscreen tablet that also served as the train's intercom and paying vid-phone for calling people off-train on the move.

Lucas nodded at the right places, smiled and thanked the two stewards for their time before closing the door and sitting on the side of the cushy bed. His armored briefcase and carry-on shoulder bag moved and creaked on the bed as he settled his weight and leaned backwards, setting out his arms and splaying his hands to support his weight from behind. He exhaled a deep sigh of satisfaction and contentment. The first important part of the day was done. He had completed all the paperwork and put it in the mail thus insuring it would take several days to travel to its processing point instead of doing it by email or the electronic filing that could now be done directly on the governmental websites. Lucas was looking for exactitude and clarity in his forms, not speed of execution. The delays were crucial to insure he passed the lines unopposed before the shit hit the fans.

Getting up from the bed while leaning on his cane for support, he undid the top three buttons of his brown flannel shirt, exposing the black t-shirt beneath. Giving himself a mental push, he began to set up his large custom built laptop on the small table and placed the safety locking wires, attaching the machine to the table's leg to prevent theft. Then he placed the armored case in the lowest open shelf and used the extensible straps on its outside to secure it from moving around with the train's vibrations. He opened the carry-on and took out the set of new pajamas, flannel pants with a drawstring and buttoned shirt with long sleeves, along with his new toiletry bag to hold the brand new, better quality items than those he had used over the last six years. Since he was starting a new life, he had decided to splurge a small bit and do for himself some shopping therapy to boost his flagging morale.

It's not like a new toothbrush, comb and hairbrush were that much luxury, but he had walked by an interesting boutique that sold mid-level and high-end utilities for travelers this afternoon, thus the new, sturdy carry-on bag, toiletry kit and some small personal thingies to make himself feel more human, feel more like himself and not just Lawrence's runaway child.

The teenager tinkered around the room, looking at the small details that he hadn't seen when the stewards had been present. There was a pair of tall, narrow windows on the external wall, one over each chair of the small dining table so each person could see outside as the train rolled. On the inside
wall, an extra large 60 inch wide view-screen had been mounted above the thin cupboard that held the cleaning supplies, dry condiments, tableware and linens like tablecloths, napkins, hand towels and such accouterments like in a hotel. The bed's headboard was a well made single wall unit with the nightstands, a few thin shelves and some overhead storage split in two compartments, one towards each outer side of the bed. The base of the bed was elevated and held two wide, deep drawers for bedding, sheets, extra pillows and such, again one for each sleeper in the room.

The wall separating from the washroom had the small wood stove right next to the door, and on its left were shelves with closing doors indicating a full height closet for coats, boots, umbrellas and other travelers' items. On the right side of the lavatory door were open shelves separated in three distinct segments: the lowest was the wood-rack for the kindling and logs, the middle was the small set of blue-enameled cast iron stoveware (pot, kettle, pan, spatula, ladle, tongs, meat fork and such) and finally, the upper shelf held a pot of tinder, boxes of wooden matches, two cans of lighter fluid and a modern flint & steel set attached to a metal wire. Everything needed to load, light and utilize the stove was in the same area, neatly stacked or placed to avoid very young children playing with fire.

Lucas hummed a tune from his favorite epic-style music as he finished setting his miserably few personal effects into the drawers and shelves on his side of the bed, the one next to the outer wall, in view of the windows. He was thankful that both frames could be opened the old fashioned way, by sliding upwards and locking with a pair of manual deadbolts, one on each side of each window. There was a fly screen in the window but it could be raised out of the way as well for unimpeded view or grabbing a branch of pine or spruce as the train passed in the more heavily forested areas of the line.

(Europe – The Final Countdown)

The young man sighed in deep relief as the mechanical sounds of the locomotives up front and clanking of the rail cars intensified just before the classic brass bell sounded out the last call to board after which the massive 40-car long vehicle began to pull out of the station, chugging along the northward route that would take Lucas to Canada, freedom and ultimately, safety.

Once the boy was used to the rhythmic swaying of the wagon, he used the rotary switch to dim the lights and then set to treat himself to a live fire in the small stove. He didn't want any beverage or food, just the beautiful lights and liveliness of the dancing flames would be enough for him tonight. That and a nice long soak in the tub before going to sleep. Wearing a small discrete smile that he kept for moments when he was alone and truly safe, he opened the glass panel of the stove to carefully pile a small amount of wood, followed by a bit of tinder from the pot on the high shelf. He took the one box of matches that was already opened and noted it was almost full. Not that he was worried; there were other boxes and the stewards probably had a stash in the cargo cars to restock all the sundries and foodstuffs in all the private cabins. Striking the match, the teen smiled wider at the rejuvenating sight of the light, dancing on the tip of the small, wooden stick. He placed it in the minute heap of tinder and blew lightly on it to give the flame air to grow. Inside of a minute, the tinder and dry kindling were alight, soon followed by the three small logs. Making certain the fire was well taken and safely contained, he closed the glass door and locked it, shaking it a bit to verify it would hold.

Standing up unsteadily from his cramped kneeling position besides the stove with the aide of his cane, the boy went to open the bathroom door to give it a better glance as well. The first thing he noticed was all the plumbing and waterworks were placed towards the far wall of the room; the toilet, vanity console, bathtub & shower combo, all were oriented so their fixtures were into the bulkhead facing towards the front of the train. It was logical, Lucas thought, just like a ship at sea, they needed to limit the number, types and positions of pipes to not take on weight or make the
system prone to breaks and jamming. Fewer pipes, clustered together but straight and well angled to take care of that.

The toilet was near the outer wall and the tall, narrow window similar to the main room. The vanity with a single sink and three-segment articulated mirror were in the center, with a pull-out swivel stool to sit while washing, shaving or doing anything else that might necessitate the tall, wide mirror and sink at the same time. The tub & shower combo took the entire left wall, the one towards the inside of the wagon. The corner of the bath where the person's head rested when they soaked leisurely was right next to the small stove's glass panel, although this one was not mobile. There was as claimed a flat surface, gently warm and large enough to hold two mugs of drink or two small plates of food. Since the tub was actually an extra-wide affair with Jacuzzi jets, it was obvious the whole cabin and bathroom had been designed in the goal of keeping a couple of lovers satisfied in all aspects of their romantic vacationing on the move.

Lucas snorted at the idea of him getting anywhere close enough to someone to have any form of sexual relations with them. After the things his back-alley slut of a mother had made him endure from her bed-warmers and assorted male-objects, he wasn't in any hurry to jump in the sack with anything for a good long while.

He turned the knobs on the tub's faucets to adjust the temperature of the flowing water and went back to the bed area to undress and stow his clothes for tomorrow. He had washed them in his office bathroom and then dry-cleaned by the cleaner's shop in the ground floor of the office complex last night before going to bed, just after shipping out his two principal trunks of parts. These clothes could be clean and presentable for the next two or three days, until he reached an acceptable hotel or country inn in the Northern part of Vancouver, far from the touristy sectors of town. Then, he'd get changed into his other set of clean clothes to go shopping so he could start accumulating enough personal effects, clothes and a few luxuries to really feel free and safe in his new life.

Now nude, he reached into the overhead storage of the bed and pulled out one of the complementary bathrobes monogrammed with the Amtrak logo and hobbled back into the bathroom to enjoy himself for a long, calm, meditative soak. Making certain he had his cellphone, spiked keyring, and tactical pen with him, he set them on the small service tray beside the tub before fussing around the two cabinets under the vanity's counter. He found the soap, scented oil and washcloth he wanted easily enough. The train line certainly didn't cheap out on him when they said it was top notch luxury throughout the cabin and trip.

( Jon Bon Jovi – It's My Life)

Setting some softly scented lemon oil in the water, he waited until it reached the desired height to shut it off, then closed the electric lights in the bathroom as the stove's glow would be enough and quite appeasing on its own. Then, holding onto the safety & lift assistance chain dangling from the ceiling, the adolescent very slowly and carefully lowered his frail, shaking body into the warm, soothing liquid. He set his head down onto the fluffy, waterproof pillow at the inclined end of the tub and closed his eyes, letting the water's swirling movements and the luminous cleansing heat from the wood fire wash over him, taking away the worries, anxieties and sorrows for the evening. As he seeped in smelly yellow water up to his neck like an overgrown lemongrass tisane, Lucas smiled in relaxed contentment for the first time in over two years. Ever since the attempted rape by that twink bastard, the teen had come to realize that he would never be safe anywhere that was set up for him by either biological parent. The only way for him to be safe was to handle the problems himself while keeping quiet and invisible at all times.

Well, he'd learned the lesson well the last time dad had been in town. He had done everything in the last two years to set up escape plans and contingencies in case of his untimely demise from unnatural
causes not linked to illness or willful suicide. He had gone as close to off-the-grids as could be while still operating through the web and postal service to establish his exit strategy out of the USA and Lawrence's legal reach. Now, he would see how far his father was willing to dabble into the deeper darkes to maintain his unholy grip on his only child. Snort! Lawwy wouldn't let go. Lucas knew that already. It was part-and-parcel of the mentality of the 'bad boys' his mother always fell for; they were nasty, possessive and dominating characters who would never accept being bested by anybody, let alone a slight, reedy, sickly little kid like him.

Lucas humphed again, opening his eyes and looking at the nice analog clock mounted above the vanity mirror's central segment. It was a brass frame with glass front and brass needles to show hours, minutes and seconds, a dial indicated the day / night cycle and small rollers spelled out the day, month and year with letters and numbers. A very nice piece of train line mechanics, just like in the old days when things were made to be tough, long lasting and beautiful at the same time. Seeing that he had in fact been seeping for almost an hour and a half, the boy looked at his finger and saw them to be wrinkled like stewed prunes and realized that his time of calm meditation had come to a stop. Sitting up in the tub, he closed the jacuzzi jets and then soaped up more for the symbolic effect of washing off the spiritual dirt and crass of his former life than any real need to clean himself. After rinsing off and pulling the plug of the tub, he very carefully stood up and then stepped out of the tub. Quickly, he then sat on the swivel stool to rub himself dry with the sinfully thick terrycloth towel that had hung on the back hooks of the bathroom's door. Damn, this was luxury for real! Note to self: find decent towels; they make even a tight, diminutive bathroom feel heavenly.

Wrapping the towel around his thin, gangly frame, the boy gazed deeply into the glowing embers of the stove, the few flickering flames spreading out their happy light and healing warmth. Sighing in rare delight, Lucas turned his head towards the outer wall, to see the buildings, road signs and occasional bridge trestles passing by the window as the train had moved out of San-Francisco Bay's urban area and was now rolling in a less populated region of California.

(Soul Asylum – Runaway Train)

Well, that was that. There was no going back at this point or everything would have been useless and Lawrence would certainly not reward him or even just leave him alone if he did get cold feet and abort his exit plan. Getting off the stool, the teen dropped the towel in the hamper and pulled on the bathrobe, clinching it tightly around his waist. Leaning on the walls, furniture and his cane in the right hand for support, he walked to the bed area and pulled on the pajama pants, deciding against wearing the shirt as the small stove made the room quite balmy and the thick comfy sheets would take care of any chill he might feel. Taking off the robe and setting it on the hook next to the bed, he pulled the covers back and then grumped annoyed. He had to walk around the bed, turn off the lights from near the entry door and then trudge back to his side of the bed to get in under the waiting fleece blanket.

Now laid out in his cocoon of warm safety, under enough sheets that even his overly thin, fatless frame would stay warm, the boy took one last deep breath to steady his heart and let the gentle rocking and swaying of the railcar lull him to slumber. He had no desire to be awake for the few towns the train would stop at for 15 to 30 minutes while US Post bags and boxes were exchanged and a few passengers disembarked for layovers scheduled in their prolonged train line cruise from the southernmost tip of California all the way up to the northernmost tip of the Rockies. The coming-and-going of others didn't concern him anymore and he didn't really care to sight-see from a moving platform, so his sleep would be sound and deep. He hoped. Anyways, he had asked the stewards to give him a wake-up call at 10:00am the next morning. He would see then how the night went.

{ SQ } - { PREVIEW ch.2 } - { SQ }
Luxury train ride up to Seattle, enjoying the vacation and taking a breath of fresh air. Some deep web searches, finding very bad information about his enemies behind Lawrence and getting spoofed by an amateur. Then, the transfer over to the Via Rail train, passing the border into Canada.
The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

WARNING; the language level of this one will be almost mild instead of the usual street-trashy when we consider a story based on boats and sailors. However, as I always warn people who read my work: this language was pretty much normal in the school yard 30 years ago when I was a teenager. So, how can you have such a thin skin and be part of the same culture on the same continent if this is really that offensive to you? Where did you spend the last few decades, if you can't take a few hard words from the mouths of kids when these words have been around since before World War I?

WARNING; the travels described in the fic are not necessarily matched to the buildings or services offered by the companies and localities in reality. This is a FF story, hence I write in such way as to make it coherent and believable. Which means that sometimes I will place trains or buses in localities the real companies don't operate. Contact Amtrak, Greyhound or Via Rail to get the real information.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

SECOND CHAPTER; BORDER LINES
The knocking on the thin metal door of the cabin was most unwelcome. Didn't these people know it was ill-mannered to wake someone from such peaceful slumber? The groggy teenager blinked his bleary eyes a few times in a futile effort to find wakefulness as the pounding continued. Another few seconds later and he realized that it wasn't pounding so much as his own head that ached along the rest of his contorted body.

Lucas had folded himself like a demented pretzel's cousin at the foot of the bed, near the only source of living warmth in the cabin and scrunched into the footboard with a pileup of blankets on top of his thin, meatless body. His subconscious effort to keep warm had paid off but left him worried about developing a bad case of lumbago, and wondering where exactly his mind had been when he moved himself that way…

"Normality, thy name is not Lucas, I tell thee…” he mused playfully at his own weirdness.

Pushing his head out from under the beaver lodge look-alike hillock of blankets, the young man frowned at the continuing discreet rapping at his door. Grunting in effort and displeasure as teenagers were most certainly moody and unpleasant when woken up too early, he hoisted himself to stand besides the bed where he stood unsteadily, swaying along the rhythm of the train while still wrapped in a pair of warm comfortable blankets as if he wore a poncho. Not at all certain he could yet move without face-planting into the carpeted floor, Lucas cleared his throat noisily then called out to the steward in the hall.

"It's okay… I'm up now… You can stop knocking on the door."

His weak-voiced words were answered by blessed silence at last. Not for long though.

"Pardon me, sir; will you be eating in the cabin or the dining car? The brunch service is still ongoing so we can easily bring something for you to enjoy privately.” The helpful employee spoke firmly through the door just as if he were actually facing his client.

Lucas pursed his lips in thought and glanced sideways at the wide, plush, warm bed that beckoned so invitingly. "Don't leave me alone" it whispered gently to his sleepy mind. Giving himself a shake like a wet dog, the blond boy frowned, forcing his mind into focus to address the situation. He did need more restful sleep as he was fighting yet another infection but he had never been a lazybones in his life and he still wasn't out of the woods yet. Especially since the train was rolling in a scenic area of Oregon filled with evergreens well beyond human sight. He could sleep once across the borderlines, when it would be safe.

Pointing his blue eyes at the door and the hidden waiter, Lucas called out again "I'll go to the dining car in a few minutes. Just have to get dressed. And properly woken up too. Think I'll put my face in the window to smell the fresh air a while. That'll set me straight. Thanks for your time."

"Yes, sir. You are welcome.” The steward answered politely before leaving to his other duties.

Lucas slowly walked, still wrapped in the bed's blankets, towards the small two-person table next to
the windows, to sit heavily on the closest chair he could reach. A bit of fumbling with the latch had the window unlocked and raised all the way to the top, allowing him to actually put his head and shoulders out of the frame to see along the track the vehicle followed. Being careful not to fall out, he leaned a bit more outwards, looking both forward and backwards to get a good comprehensive view of the trackway, vegetation and the mountainous skyline in the far off distance.

Yeppp… Oregon State's wild lands alright.

The fresh forest air embalmed him with its coniferous scents, allowing him to close his eyes and calm down from his rude awakening. The background sounds of the train's 'chug-chug-chug' along the rails' joints and warbling birds hidden in the trees all over the dells and hillocks made for a peaceful scene such as Lucas had rarely ever experienced in life. Giving his lanky frame another shake, he sighed deeply in regret as necessities called. Closing down the window pane, he regretfully chugged the warm mass of blankets at the bed as he trudged to the bathroom. Once he had communed with nature in his own way, accompanied by an ultra-hot 10-minute shower to warm up, he would get dressed to make his way towards the restaurant car. Eating aboard a moving salon would be a first time experience for him, which he looked forward to.

A half hour later saw Lucas much more awake as he finished buttoning his brown shirt to complete his ensemble. He was wearing the same clothes as yesterday, just as he had planned to do until he reached the hotel in Vancouver in Canada. The adolescent made sure his laptop was solidly attached to the table just like last night before grabbing his cellphone, spiked key-chain, tactical pen, wallet, card holder and new mechanical wristwatch. Humming quietly a tune from his collection of epic tracks, he went through the door and then right towards the dining cab.

He nodded at the steward as they crossed in the hallway. The man was from the morning shift; Lucas had only seen him once before at the time of boarding so he took better note of his features and demeanor just in case. Was he paranoid? Yes. But then again, he really did have a coterie of bastards after his pasty hide so it was necessary to be careful and vigilant all around.

The few minutes of slow cane-assisted walk to the restaurant helped to clear his mind of the last wisps of sleepiness, especially when the smells of cooked food reached his nose. Lucas would happily admit that the best way to wake him was to waft the smell of fresh coffee or warm buttery toast under his nose. He wasn't a morning person just by professional needs. Like most computer hackers he worked deep into the night as that was when his clients preferred to allow outside access to their corporate systems during the normally scheduled daily period of non-use.

Finally stepping into the wide open luminous car, Lucas smiled at the large tall windows, deeply cushioned chairs and open drinks counter where a steward gestured at him, silently offering a piping hot coffee straight out of the massive brass machine sitting on the serving surface. Taking a cup with saucer, spoon and napkin, the teenager held it out for fill-up then walked around to choose a table. As soon as he was sat at a small two-seat emplacement with the window at his left side, the female waiter came with a menu. He showed her his boarding pass so she could write the client number on the invoice as his meals and snacks were included in the travel package he had paid for. Less admin and accounting to handle that way. A few words to insure the brunch service was still in action saw him order a large plate of eggs, toast, Belgian waffle, bacon, sausages and spicy potatoes with a side of baked beans. It was a bit bigger than what he ate at 'home' in his office-cum-apartment normally but this was both a vacation and his escape into a new life. It called for a few liberties to celebrate properly his hard-earned freedom.

The young man spent the next fifteen minutes slowly reading through an old paper copy of the
'Glaming the rails of America' magazine dated from June of last year. The monthly publication was funny in its kitschiness. The editor was a fifty seven year old drag-queen from New York that had worked for Amtrak during three decades before a bad divorce and loosing his job in the same year turned his fortunes the wrong way. So the man decided to stop hiding what he was inside, to live what was left of his life the fullest and damn the rest of the lot. It turned out that his knowledge of rail lines and services across Canada, USA and Mexico was valuable. He quickly managed to find three major partners to start up his magazine despite having just come out to the world. As editor and principal reporter, the Queen of Steel gave the periodical an amusing airy tone like a mix of Skymall, Vogue, The World Tourism Guide and Madam De Luxe all in one. The light diva's tone of the articles coupled with the ads about travel gadgets and services made for an easy read. The "faaabulous" pictures of hotels, city scenes, naturescapes and the latest fashions in tourism clothing made it an entertaining little thing to flip the pages of.

The female waiter brought his meal rather quickly as restaurant service went. To date, the cleanliness and decor of the room had been nice but it really was the serving staff that made the experience worth repeating at some point in the future. Slowly working his way through his eggs, waffle and assorted sides, Lucas paid little attention to the open magazine on the far end of the table. He began to actively listen in on the conversations from the other tables while keeping his head and gaze fixated on his own place setting to avoid being seen eavesdropping. It was simple curiosity on his part.

He had never really traveled much in his life aside from the big move when he left Buffalo City in New York State at the age of 10 to go attend Stanford in Silicon Valley in California. That was six years ago and no longer a marking memory. Honestly, at that time what few possessions he had owned were packed by his personal household staff at the Wise Manor and shipped out by UPS ground freight about two weeks ahead of his own move. He had been put on a privately chartered prop-plane with two big engines and a small isolated sleeping cabin at the back of the tail. Lawrence hadn't wanted anybody to see how much difficulty Lucas had to move and react due to the medications he took to help recover from the injuries his felonious parent's latest beating had caused him. The child had slept like a gravestone all flight long and most of the ground transport as well. He had been woken up in the rental car just before entering the hotel he would stay at until Stanford's Young Prodigies Program sent a tutor to take charge of him. Those four days alone in that 3 star room had been the most peaceful of his life to date.

Closing his flint-blue eyes in sorrowful memory, Lucas slowly chewed his waffle bite, savoring the european taste of vanilla mixed with the natural pure maple syrup he had ordered as a treat to celebrate his coming freedom and give himself a little energy boost to tough out the day. He needed to wait until late afternoon when he could take a two hour long nap before disembarking at Seattle City in Washington State for the transfer over to the Via Rail link up to Vancouver in British Columbia inside the Canadian Borders. The trip from Seattle to Vancouver would take a long part of the night so he could sleep some more at that time. Watching through the window at night while trying to identify which type of conifers or deciduous trees they were rolling by just didn't sound that appealing for some reason…

Turning his eyes outwards to the scenic landscapes they were traversing, the teenager sipped some coffee as he discretely listened in on his neighbors. Nothing bad. Nothing to worry about. Nobody voicing low-toned nastiness or bellowing foulness about his going out of the country alone. Letting out a sigh of anxiety that he didn't know he had been bottling up, he pulled back his attention away from the dining car and back to the funny kitsch magazine on his table. He resolved to take out his cellphone and type a memo about a few of the other publications named inside. Some of them looked either very amusing or maybe somewhat practical if he had to travel a lot in the coming months.

Unspoken even to himself, was the dark, ominous cloud of trouble that he would have to wade
through if Lawrence decided to bypass all laws and borders to send people after him for a forcible extraction like some churches did to grab kids and bring them to Jesus-camps for conversion therapies. Lucas would not put it passed his father to embezzle money from WPP to pay his legal fees in a court battle against his son but didn't truly know where the abusive bastard would stop in order to retain control of his favorite victim.

If he had to go off-grid in the depths of winter in the canadian wilderness, he'd need preparation and materials. First off would be an off-road vehicle like a pick-up or station wagon, something that he could lie down inside to sleep sheltered from snow, winds and animals. A large foreman's pickup truck with 4-wheel drive, enlarged tires and a permanently fixed one-man sleep cab could be enough for a long time since he had nobody to take care of. The alternative could be a small short trailer just big enough for a bed, wood stove and dry toilet. He could even get a standard contractor's trailer but have it fully insulated against all seasons. Add some tinted windows for privacy and a retractable chimney pipe to close everything down for travel on the open roads and he would look just like any other jobber going around between clients.

This would need thought and a good search on his laptop back in his cabin. It would also keep him occupied so he didn't let the warm, welcoming bed drag him back to the depths of sleep before his appointed siesta just before dinner. He had plenty of time to plan his off-road disappearance if it became a necessity but he might as well start early. After all, his early preventive planning was what allowed him to be here safely rather than on his way to an invisible motorized military gulag at the bottom of the sea. Yes. Come to think of it, some reading of diverse canadian hunting and fishing zones maps, winter & forest survival booklets and camping expertise guides was in order.

Just in case. With his father being the way he was, better over-prepared than sorry.

Contemplations of hinterlands

(Two Steps From Hell – Casablanca)

Wednesday 16th of December, 2020; 12:25pm (noon)
Amtrak train, VIP cabin
Oregon State, USA

Lucas sat stifflly on the padded wooden foot chest at the end of the bed, distractedly looking into the reddish embers that still glowed softly inside the small wood stove. He had added a log before going for his brunch so the fire didn't go out. The heat wasn't really needed since the cabin's climate control was excellent but he liked using the fire as a meditative aid, something to focus on when his mind wandered off.

Extending his hands towards the living flames that danced merrily inside the glass enclosure, Lucas felt the warmth quickly climb up his thin bony arms, giving back some sensitivity to his thin meatless fingers. As the train rolled northwards, the temperature steadily dropped and there was now a thick blanket of white snow covering most of the landscape they traversed. Up in Washington State it would be worse, especially in Seattle near the wide open harbor where the ocean winds could come deeply into the city unhindered by buildings or hills.

The teenager shivered just at the thought of that much cold, wind and snow all together. Because of his life-long health problems with repeated assaults and the related injuries, infections and medications, his body had never in his 16 years of life been able to store enough nutrients to properly grow and fill out. Sure, he was tall for his age at almost 5 feet 10 inches but he weighed only a measly 130 pounds. Snorting in contempt at his own body and situation, the boy decidedly ignored
the fact that he had chosen to let his hair grow out not just to hide the scars on his head but specifically because of the added weight it provided when a doctor measured his stats. When attempting to be normal, every little bit counted. Still, that was just an illusion to willfully blind himself to his bad health.

Rubbing his hands together, he glared angrily at the thin almost invisible scars that ran along his fingers and palms, reminders of the whipping one of the early Lawrence-hired tutors had inflicted. The man had been an old brit bastard who kept pining out loud for the days of the Great Empire Britannia that spanned the globe and kept the niggers, yellows and other coloreds under foot as was the 'proper civilized way' in the Golden Age of European Civilization. He valued the traditional British 'stiff upper lip' stoicism and silent endurance through adversity like the colonial troops of yore were trained.

As many such men of that generation, he was an avid flogger of young boys and while not a pedophile in the sexual sense, he certainly took orgasmic pleasure in beating, breaking and dominating male infants. Beating their hands with an electrical cord hard enough to lacerate the skin and scar for life was his 'thing'; it reminded him of his youth in the Empire's good old 'public schools' of Portsmouth where boys were caned with rattan rods on their hands, backs or even bare ass depending on the 'preference' of the teacher.

Sick twisted bastards, him and the population that spawned him.

The man had been afraid of what an overly intelligent, inventive child motivated by anger against the pain of his punishments could create with such agile digits to retaliate against the adults around him as they tried to forcefully dominate him. So, the elderly man made an agreement with Lawrence for the right to try and break Lucas, specifically his small fragile hands. The geriatric criminal's goal was to inflict enough damages to render Lucas barely able to eat and wash himself without help while no longer being capable of the fine motor control required by chemistry or mechanics so he could no longer build devices to help his resistance against Order and Britannic (White Christian) Discipline.

The geriatric criminal had barely given the six first strokes to each hand when the four year old child realized the danger he faced. The adult told him that he would get 'braces' of six on each hand hard enough to cause lasting bleeding injuries until he learned that "the best and most honest form of respect towards adults was to FEAR them at all times". When the small infant understood that the man meant to mark him for life, possibly at the risk of crippling him beyond medicine's help, he knew he had to defend himself or die trying. His parents certainly wouldn't help, Lawrence might even be depraved enough to hold him down while the other man beat and destroyed his hands.

Lucas had backed away from the angrily yelling man long enough to pull a small glass vial from his pocket which he managed to open despite his bleeding shredded hands. When he threw the liquid at the man's face, it melted away parts of his head and shoulder, paralyzing him with the pain for several hours, long enough for the police to be called and come investigate. Lawrence was enraged beyond all descriptions as he was publicly proven to be a bad parent and accomplice to child-beating. That was why Lucas was sent to live with Cynthia for a few years. It was her boyfriend of the time, a high-flying plastic surgeon for the rich, who repaired the injuries then lasered the scars until they were almost invisible. Boy had his mother made him pay for that… She REALLY hated it when anybody took the center of attention away from her own munificence.

Almost 12 years had passed and still the marks were present. His thin meatless fingers were more agile and flexible than ever but still sensible and prone to seizing or twisting the wrong way if he wasn't careful of his movements. Since he would have some heavy manual labor in his near future once he owned a vehicle and camping gear, he needed to invest in some work gloves and find an exercise plan for hand orthopedics soon.
Turning his head towards the windows, the young man looked without seeing at the scenery, white-clad greenery and rocky hill sides passing by rapidly as the train moved north unrelentingly. While it was beautiful in a wintry way, it was also rather bleak. Everything was whitewashed with powdery snow, asleep under the heavy blanket and helpless to change that until spring thaws came to pass. Just like his life.

Moving from his seat, he grabbed the enameled kettle to fill it up with cold water from the bathroom taps. He would brew some mellow mocha-cream coffee for the rest of the trip. It would give him some warmth inside his chest as he sat by the window, browsing the Internex for several topics he had begun to think about in relation to the nastier "what ifs" that had been swirling around his mind since waking up this morning.

After setting his kettle on the wood stove to boil, he sat at the small table facing towards the front of the train. That way he could see what was coming up along the side of the line as they moved. It was less nauseating than watching from the other side as everything went past without warning. He powered the laptop then immediately entered the complex 24 character login code before the screen lit up. He placed his left thumb on the digital print scanner built into the body of the computer. With the basic OS primed, the higher setup activated; the small camera mounted just above the screen came to life, scanning his visage from collarbones to the top of his hair for a 36-points facial recognition software to process. When the still black screen flashed a small white icon in its middle for three seconds, Lucas spoke out loud in Russian, then Greek, then Hebrew until all three phrases had passed the voice recognition system. Now the CPU was fully unlocked, placing the desktop items and apps visibly for usage.

Lucas had custom built and secured his machine as part of the homework and term assignments he passed to earn his Mastery 'Mechanical & Cybernetics engineering for public utilities services' for which he had just received the diploma about 4 years ago while he was still 12 years old. After getting his other cheaper laptops busted and violated by Lawrence, Cynthia, their minions or the young thugs in Stanford, the teenager had learned to lock and code EVERYTHING he owned, even at the cost of being beaten each time a criminal tried and failed to hijack his systems or crack his safety furniture.

With the laptop properly activated, Lucas clicked the apps to connect with the train's WiFi systems. He opened his cellphone to recover the device ID, port # and password needed to get onto the bandwidth as a paying client of the rail line. This unlimited access to the Internex WiFi signal was included in his customized package as a business traveler in the upper class. If he had taken the usual coach type of package, he would have to pay around ten dollars per hour and that with a much slower speed than the 350 megabytes per second he would now be enjoying. It was just a pity that his machine had been conceived, built and programmed with fiber-optics in mind. All the network connectors & chipset could reach 2,25 gigabytes per second but it would be a very rare situation that would allow that much data to stream through the cable or airwaves. In any case, Lucas was happy he didn't have to unfold the two flexible antennae from the sides of the monitor to activate the integrated satellite telephone system to have a working signal since he really wanted to hide that particular capacity for an emergency.

As soon as the machine beeped that the connection was established (and tested, scanned and all protections running on high alert) the teenager tapped the screen of his cellphone to active the automated synchronization apps between the two devices. This also activated the email & social media management suite he had custom built to properly handle his multiple personal, familial, business and judicial affairs that were now presented in four easy to follow side-by-side streams.
There was a blithely menacing message from his father. The message from his mother was unexpected but her bitching about his obligated continuing at Stanford because she wanted NOTHING to do with his pasty hide was habitual for her. There was a novelty though; a little piece of floating debris from some noisy menial cur called Lieutenant Denalt over at the UEO Navy yards in New Cape Quest warning him to "be on time at his ship's departure OR ELSE there would be consequences that daddy's money wouldn't protect him from".

Someone obviously had TWO misinformation problems; 1) Lawrence's money had never protected or helped Lucas in any ways and 2) the guy obviously thought that the laws about child labor and imprisonment didn't apply to him and his crew. The demented cad would soon learn differently as Lucas saved the message to over a dozen servers across the planet before sending it to his lawyers both in San Francisco and Buffalo plus the multiple child protection agencies they had put on the case. Let the sailor-boy handle that and see what comes of it!

Now he had before him the daily business of deleting the two-hundred or so trash-mails of multivariated porn, several obscure online pharmacies offering questionable pills, political action committees asking financial support, churches trying to recruit him (probably as a cute cuddly victim for their preachers) and a pair of classic fraudulent 'old lady from Congo' asking for his bank account number so they could use it to store away an inheritance to avoid paying the country's estate taxes (yeah, he was dumb enough to believe THAT! Snort!). With the SPAM and trash properly deleted and erased from his disk, the boy was now able to work from a clean slate.

Activating the small memo app on his cellphone he had used to pile up two dozen or so little ideas over the last three days, Lucas opened the private program he had created to automate and run several web searches (investigations) in parallel while he did something else more intuition-driven than what cybernetics could handle. After setting up several search threads about Lawrence & Cynthia (just updates) he created new ones for SeaQuest, UEO flagship, UEO Navy, US Naval Intelligence, World Power Plant Project and a couple more related loosely to the first batch.

In an effort to get as much directly relevant first-degree information as possible, Lucas browsed the official website that the UEO Navy had created to boast about their newly rebuilt and re-purposed flagship. Just as he thought, the navy had wanted to drum up corporate support so they had two different pages on the site about shipboard personnel: one for the military crew and another for the civilians which were further divided between permanent crew and external company reps. This allowed Lucas to grab the names, pictures, stats and basic biography of each person to feed into his surveillance matrix for long-term overwatch. Should any of these people start moving physically towards his location or broadcast any type of message that traveled over the wires or airwaves, his program would eavesdrop it, scan it and report it with even a sonic alarm if the comments contained certain key words or concepts that were symptoms of hostile intent towards the young man.

To make certain that the remote electronic surveillance continued even when the laptop was closed or broken, Lucas activated the synch function that transferred all of the program's settings, queries and data updates to the 'master cloud' which was spread between about three hundred zombie-bots that the teenager had illegally penetrated, cleaned up, optimized and then thoroughly infected to serve as his invisible automated listening posts around the planet. These people didn't even realize that old servers, automated security monitors and backup vaults were now sharing their storage and bandwidth with a rather nasty cyberspy platform answering to Lucas only. This meant that even if several of the ghost systems were damaged, reformatted or scrapped off, Lucas could not lose control of his phantom VPI (virtual private network) due to its decentralized nature and management methodology. This also meant that if his personal CPU's were stolen or damaged, he just needed to find an Internex access point of any kind, open the proper invisible & unlisted website, type in the access codes and voila! Back in business as if it never stopped for even a second. Unless the teenager wanted to destroy his multi-shelled operations and shutter his remote surveillance, nobody could
force it to happen.

Well, not true…

The FBI cyber-crimes division and the US military's Intel branches had the tech and willpower to make it happen. They just didn't have enough truly competent people operating at his level nor the budgets to waste on finding and shutting down his phantom activities. It behooved him to keep on making certain they never got the incentive to put people and money on his trail by staying a low profile player who bothered nobody. As long as he simply did overwatch and surveillance without causing damages or data theft, the cops and soldiers couldn't care less about him. If he did do damages or stole data for corporate use… The warhounds would come and he wouldn't be able to hide for long.

Ugh! Enough of those thoughts…

Now that the basic long-range watchtowers were set-up, Lucas stood from his chair, stretching out his arms and back to work out the kinks before going to the wood stove. He placed another pair of small logs in the stove to bank the flames then poured himself a piping hot coffee in a quaint enameled mug that matched the kettle. It made the gentle souled boy smile as he gazed at the camping-style mug, his thoughts far away to a time when he would be able to sit on his porch with a small hibachi and his own kit of stovewares to work, read or just enjoy the open breeze of Nature. Closing his eyes while he wrapped his thin fingers around the warm metallic mug, Lucas dared to daydream about a better time and place in the near future, when he would be able to stand still in one place, unafraid and unhurried.

Opening his flint-blue eyes again to the dreary world that menaced his well-being, the adolescent quickly fixed his coffee to his taste with long practiced ease before sitting at his computer for another go at cyberspace. With almost eleven minutes of search time accrued, the military-grade surveillance software he had created and sold to his preferred paying client, the World Bank, was bound to have already found something for him to manually analyze. The boy couldn't help the audible snort of disbelief when he read the basic outline of the SeaQuest's readiness assessment. It was pitifully symptomatic of the mismanagement styles of the USA's Trump administration and the decide-by-crisis dis-order of the Dre cabinet at the UEO Treaty Council building.

As he sipped his warm mocha-cream drink, Lucas could only shake his head in disapproval of the idiocies he witnessed. He was only fifteen years old right now and for a few more days, without any military experience or training to boot, but still… He owned and ran many multi-million dollar companies with around 2,000 employees and almost 5,000 established clients. He KNEW what had to be DONE or AVOIDED to keep a business running smoothly and profitably. How in tarnation did anybody worth the rank patches on their shoulder boards justify this sort of thing? Fully HALF of the ship's military postings were not filled! Not because they lacked competent commissioned officers or enlisted men, either! NO! It was the bloody money! They had not finished filling the postings because they didn't have the BUDGET as the leasable laboratories and workshops set aside for outside corporations to rent were not all leased yet. This created a nasty shortfall in the budget which meant that the ship was stuck in dock until it was actually self-financing its crew salaries, fuel and services expenditures.

"WHAT a load of tepid liquid crap!"

The adolescent wearily passed a hand though his long blond hair, scratching interrogatively at his scarred scalp as he looked at the AI-generated reports. The military situation was near-disastrous but the civilians made him cringe in worry. NONE had been verified or vetted passed the Level-3 clearance. On a ship tasked with nuclear engines and munitions that required even the deck sweeping
janitors to have at least Level-2 just to get onboard and Level-3 to actually enter the conference rooms or the command areas to clean, it was a piss-poor decision. Some of the chemicals and bio-active products in the laboratories were rated above the minimal clearances asked of the company reps but without any clearly declared protocol for the background checks and vetting of the scientists who would need higher security grades to work these labs and materials. It was almost as if the decision was based more…

"MONEY!" Lucas exclaimed aloud in disbelief.

The damned fools! They were planning to assign the security access and right-of-use of the restricted quarantine zones according to whom payed the most! The USA and UEO cabinets had truly fallen on their heads if they didn't realize the dangers inherent to such a decisional process! How many times in history had rich bastards decided to pay mercenaries to go into a government building or competitor's campus to cause sabotage and steal confidential data? The whole thing seemed from an outside perspective as if it was optimized to facilitate the theft of scientific and military data by poorly vetted and badly watched 'civilians' who could in fact be mercs, traitors or even professional spies like what Russia and China, as members of the UEO Treaty, were bound to place aboard.

Damn! What a shit-pit that was! Lucas was now incredibly happy to have, quite literally in fact, jumped ship before the thing set sail out of harbor. There was truly nothing but misery, incompetence and backstabbing waiting for him inside that floating coffin.

{ SQ } - { PiQ } - { SQ }

The teenager sat leaning against the frame of the opened window, his right side a bit chilly from contact with the cool metal but the warmth of the coffee wafting up from his freshly refilled mug kept his hands, face and innards nicely tempered. The forcible cool breeze generated by the train's motion helped to cleanse his lungs and mind with its embalming snowy pine scents. Taking a deep breath, the youth smiled widely at the gentle rocking of the train car, the rhythmic 'chug' of metal wheels along the rails lulling him into a calm, meditative state.

Opening his eyes, the boy checked the time on his watch, 13:32pm, before letting out a weary groan of displeasure. The huge warm bed was calling his name again but it was much too early for a nap or he would be out of sorts for the line transfer and border crossing tonight. Making a moue that could very well be described as a pout (if young men actually did such a thing) Lucas closed the window and began typing away at his keyboard again.

This time, his focus was on the 'supposedly' secured 'military grade' network of the World Power Plant. He had already hacked into his father's personal apartment but the man never kept anything of any value in the CPU over there. Neither did he ever let any critical data accumulate inside his cellphone. For an engineer, architect and geophysics expert carrying three PhD's, the man was rather severely limited in his day-to-day usage of communications technologies. Lucas knew full well that his parent had always been weary of leaving traces of his multiple dastardly deeds long before his much beleaguered son recorded and played back the events from two years ago. THAT particular event must simply have driven the older male to even harsher distrust and disuse of any electronics outside of his immediate purview inside the WPP construction campus.

Grabbing a classic twisted pretzel from the plastic bag he had found inside the snack cupboard besides the mini-fridge, Lucas hummed as the salty taste mixed and balanced the creamy sugary taste of his last sip of coffee. Letting his mind roam a bit as his eyes gazed boredly at the rows of algorithms and codes, the unwillingly displaced migrant wondered why exactly it was taking so much time to connect to WPP servers from the route he had chosen. Getting frustrated at the delay, over three minutes yet, Lucas mumbled nastily under his breath as he shrunk the window, setting it
among the background processes. A new window was quickly active, the basic pre-coded template for another hack into Level-6 clearance and above servers scrolling down as fast as the boy could type in the blank spaces the required device ID, port #, username and passwords that he had ill-gotten from trolling around the darker sectors of the web's basement levels.

The unlawful data had cost him a few coins at the time but had proven well worth the investment.

Good! Now the host server was connecting, giving access to some low security local services inside its building and, more importantly, a far less protected US Navy intranet passerelle between that server (Level-3) and the one that was the actual target (Level-6). The cyber-road was normally used by DARPA to either do remote maintenance on the network or establish software links between people who collaborated in the many high-security projects in a discrete manner. In an even more restricted way, the varied US Armed services' Intelligence Departments also employed exactly that level of the server backbone to route the spywares used to watch and investigate suspected spies, traitors and potential terrorism conspirators that hid amongst the ranks of the US military and contractors.

Chewing another pretzel, Lucas refined his connection parameters whilst also adjusting the hack’s usage of bandwidth to a lesser streaming speed. He absolutely needed to do this with finesse and subtlety to stay undiscovered else he would be found out and arrested publicly for sabotage which would then be held against him at the trial between his father and himself. The goal here was to slow down and diminish his signal to make it look as if it were simply an innocuous automated signal from the inventory tag or door-opening sensor of some inane thingie in a building well away from where the hacked server was located.

Lucas was guiding his hacking techniques along what he knew of peoples' habits from his own experiences at working with others on large-system maintenance sweeps. Humans had a habit of mentally 'disconnecting' from the task when they saw a wide, long list of little colored codes that each signified the status of a remotely managed device. Since the only way to check on such was to click each item of each line to blow-up the report to visible size, most server maintenance crews NEVER bothered doing that. In essence, unless the technician knew by heart WHAT exactly the little light of item 24 on line 4,057,390 meant, it would not even make it passed the eyes of the poor man as he checked to see if the server was performing its tasks properly. This natural basic weakness inbuilt into the human psyche and behavior made the playing field naturally favorable to hackers, but only IF they knew how to exploit it and had the discipline to not get arrogant or full of their own exploits.

Now, Lucas lived and breathed the machine languages, codes and mathematical complexities that were the equivalent to atoms and molecules in the material world and fortunately there were very few people with similar capacities. Also, the spectrum covering those actual capacities was rather wide. While he may not be the penultimate top of the list, Lucas was quite comfortably in the top 1% of the most competent, knowledgeable cybernetics' engineers active this day and he knew it. Without bragging, boasting or thumping his chest either! However, that would mean nothing if he became careless with his work ethics, security and healthy dose of functional paranoia that had kept him invisible and free up to date.

Lucas was quite unlike the current generation of hackers, born passed year 2000, that were almost mentally defective in their endemic need to film and broadcast on social media platforms absolutely everything they did, even criminal or socially forbidden stuff. That particular brand of retardedness would never strike Lucas as he had the opposite problem of being morbidly secretive about his personal privacy and data archive confidentiality. Making a spectacle of himself in public would be necessary for the trial against Lawrence and the immigration hearings and stuff, but that was it. If the Canadian government could be convinced to do all that in private behind closed doors, he would
order his lawyers to make it happen that way.

THEY were out to get him after all, Lawrence and his paid church minions, and he was presently in
the process of committing espionage with, if the chance was presented to him, a good dose of
sabotage and virtual vandalism as well. Opportunism was not a bad thing, be it in entrepreneurship or
electronic warfare, and the young man was quite good at both in his own unique ways.

"Yeah… Better not get caught doing this…” Lucas thought glibly as he munched another salted
bread treat while scrutinizing the rows and rows of code that scrolled down madly before his
squinted eyes.

Another three hours of silent arduous mental work saw a first glimmer of results on the horizon as his
surreptitious stroll around the back-ways of the USA's military backbone finally brought him to a
zone where communications between private company bigwigs and navy officials were archived
'securely' in case an investigation was needed at some further time. This was a policy started many
decades ago when the first magnetic tapes capable of recording data had been created; the
government wiretapped itself systematically in order to catch corruption, sabotage and traitors selling
secrets to the enemy (or other political parties). This surveillance was dense, omnipresent, but also
very well buried into the back of every machine or program in use by the US management services.
On top of that, it never showed up in public unless there was an investigation or public trial so the
vast majority of people, even in the Intelligence Services, tended to forget its existence and the
massive trove of archived calls, faxes and emails it contained. There was even an accumulation of
scans of paper mail since several departments had established the policy of scanning and archiving
every piece of solid contact they received from citizens, corporations or foreign entities. Also, every
piece of judicial evidence in every level of court in the USA was since 2007 to be scanned or filmed
for archiving in case the evidence warehouses caught fire or flooded as happened every now and
then.

Lucas, however, never forgot this dragon's hoard of secrets and communiques as this was his most
efficient and prolific source of privileged information when he wanted to keep an eye on his father's
contacts and activities. His personal and corporate survival depended a lot on his access to the system
and prompt updates of his search queries, so he logged on at least twice a week, even when he was
ill or dead tired. Needs must and all that rot…

And so it was that dear beloved (hem, hem…) Lawrence had gotten into bed with some two-bit
bastard called 'William Allard Boyd Noyce' who worked in US Naval Intelligence until his recent
move to loftier perches inside the UEO Treaty cabinet as 'Chief of Fleet Assets'. The man was an
admiral for several years already, incestuously close to three of the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff in the
Pentagon and now placed as the 'dark horse' candidate from America. He somehow managed to
hijack the job which was practically in the hands of French admiral Philibert 'swampy' Dumarais
who was set aside rather savagely after he had specially traveled to NCQ from Marseilles for the
final interview and swearing in of the position.

The whole thing smelt of a setup between the Trump White House and Andrea Dre's cabinet. There
were apparently seven other cases of mismanaged nominations, all of them going to American
nominees despite the Treaty Members' Council having voted to place European, Chinese or
Canadian people in those jobs. The amount of political goodwill Andrea Dre lost then turned to
enmity by those moves while making it look as if the whole UEO administration was just the USA's
plaything was mindboggling. It was as if the woman had no political acumen whatsoever despite the
fact that she had managed to climb up to the top of the UEO Council from what most people thought
of as a dead village lost in backwaters. Okay, New Zealand was neither a ghost town nor a
backwater, but try telling that to the people who lived in North America or Europe… Bigotry and
nationalism aside, the woman had little political activity to her name in her own country, no military
service and her corporate experiences to date had been somewhat ordinary.

How the Hell did she manage to climb so high? Why was she now sacrificing very large troves of political capital that she would need when the Council reunited to vote again for a secretary-general and new cabinet members in about six months this year? She had a nomination process to survive but she had been placing patsies and straw men around like there was no tomorrow in sight…

"Oh, fuck me hard with a phone pole, why don't you!" Lucas exclaimed as his mind went to overdrive as the patterns began to converge before his mind's eye. It was so bloody evident it was surprising nobody in Europe had realized yet. Andrea Dre had never been meant to survive the coming nomination cycle; she had been placed on the cabinet as a throw-away, an easily replaceable patsy that would accept bribes to place the people the Trump Team and campaign advisers wanted put in place then take the fall publicly as SHE was the corrupt one, not them. They simply proposed some names which were then defended by the PAC's in Washington DC the usual way (bribes) but it would be Dre who was guilty of accepting the gifts and favors, not the PAC's themselves as the Trumpists would see to their defense under 'First Amendment' arguments.

That meant that Andrea Dre could therefore accept dirty money in peace while people screamed and wailed, knowing full well that she would endure a token sham of a trial with maybe a few months of public services and financial penalties if anything came of it. The traitorous bitch was both the hatchet woman and the fall-gal, all rolled into one.

At that very moment Lucas's overly bright mind finally caught up with a small bit of minutiae that he had jumped over in his speed-read of the updates about his father's activities.

It wasn't a good event.

THAT was how William Noyce wound up so high in both the US military and UEO Fleet despite several complaints against him pending before the US Navy's Judge Advocate General and two civil litigations for attempts at creating a religiously indoctrinating environment inside his department whilst he was ADMIRAL 2-stars… 'DIRECTOR'… of… US Naval Intelligence…

"FUUUUUCK!" Lucas screamed in wide-eyed fear as he finally hit some paydirt about his father's newest ally in committing depravities against his poor son.

Dropping the empty enameled mug from his shaking hands, the teenager grabbed the sides of his monitor to steady himself as he read the public biography and service excerpts about the ADMIRAL that were on the UEO's official website where all the position holders were listed along with their job description, immediate supervisor and the two levels of immediate subordinates under them. Lucas shook in raw visceral fear as he gazed at the long list of accomplishments accrued over four decades in the US Naval Services since the man left high school. He enlisted at 17 with his diploma barely signed by the institution, went to the Naval Academy with the clear goal of becoming an officer ASAP and was breveted inside the standard 3 years. He joined active ranks where he opted right from the start to join the Navy Intel operations into which he disappeared for most of his service.

Most of what Noyce did in his life was classified thus unavailable to the public except to state that he had been instrumental in the conduct of several successful black-ops and he had spent 9 years running the department before transferring to the UEO 2 years ago. His biggest achievement was supposedly in developing the US Navy's cyber-defense capacities to the point where they could now launch preemptive electronic strikes at the systems of 'rogue' nations before they committed seriously egregious acts against US assets by the same method. Noyce's induction statement when he took the UEO job was about "…Augmenting the remote surveillance and retaliation capacities of the Free
World Nations against the Rogue elements of the Globe without putting human lives at risk by favoring cyberwar and drone vehicles…”

NOYCE had wanted Lucas from the get-go.

Lawrence might think that the idea to set him off aboard a military battleship for 'disciplinary redressment' was his idea but Lucas would bet his life and soul that it had been proposed by Noyce as an aside during a generic conversation about family, school, public service and whatnot…

Fear; atrocious, gut churning fear…

Sliding the laptop away from him, Lucas leaned backwards in his chair, tilting his head back until he looked at the ceiling, unfocused eyes gazing at nothing for several minutes while his mind tried to reboot from the severe shock it had just endured. Slowly resetting his mental faculties, the boy stood up then hobbled unsteadily to the bathroom where he turned the faucet to run the hot water in the sink whilst he hunted down a smaller towel than the bath throw. Having found a medium sized towel in the linen shelf besides the window, he rolled up his shirt sleeves then cupped his hands under the faucet to gather water to splash into his bone-cold face. As he committed his ablutions, the healing warmth of the flowing liquid seeped through his fingers, palms, jaw and cheeks, lending him strength and rejuvenation to face the new, very potent threat.

Sitting on the pivoting stool, his right arm resting on top of the vanity to steady him, Lucas gazed pensively at the flames in the woodstove as he finished drying his visage and forearms. A look at the bath had him thinking that another long soak would do him a world of good and he scheduled just that before going to the dining car for a long hearty evening meal. A bit of hydrotherapy would soothe his aching leg joints and maybe even help calm his emotional turmoil so he could think straight to plot a course through this morass of shadows, politics, religion, Alt-Right paranoia and White Racism that defined the USA society since the first Obama election in 2008. The teenager began to undo the buttons on his shirt, pulling it out of his pants at the same time, as he decided that he really needed a nap then and there to rebuild his forces and give his poor mind some time to refill the battery. Something like two hours ought to be enough for now to tide him over through dinner and the line change afterwards. Completely taking off everything but his shorts and t-shirt, he bundled everything together, dumped it on the chair besides the table and laptop then closed every source of light and sound that wasn't the wood stove. Sliding under the bed sheets, the teen yawned loudly before turning around, eyes closed and already out of it before his head hit the pillow.

Forgotten by its master, the laptop continued its diligent efforts at connecting with WPP's management server through some forgotten conceptor's private backdoor, repeatedly trying its automated hacking tools until a positive response came. Since Lucas had only one such connection active and he had not set any real apps or tools to work on it, the computer's efforts were rather menial. Unfortunately, that did mean that the machine was emitting a signal and a port was open in its cybernetic defenses. Someone with enough time, tools and desire could backtrack it, locate the source and try to do something about it. Since the only indicator of the connection being active was shrunk down to a miniature icon in the bottom of the task bar, it would take time for the adolescent to see it and remember what he had forgotten when it should have been closed long ago.

Evening meal and thoughts

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Wednesday 16th of December, 2020; 19:01pm
Amtrak train, VIP cabin & salon car

Washington State, USA

The metallic bell of the old-style travel alarm clock on the bedside table woke up Lucas in an annoyed mood like nothing else had in at least six months. Giving the analog brass wind-up device some TLC with his left hand (a resounding smack) soon had blessed silence reestablished in the dark cabin with only the crackling of the burning wood in the stove as background noise. Grumbling nasty imprecations in seven tongues about the evils of technology unchecked, a disheveled mop of unruly blond hair emerged ponderously from beneath the mound of blankets covering the wide comfortable bed. Like a Krachen rising from the abyssal depths seeking hapless victims, the second most voracious beast known to this world arose to disgrace reality with its unholy presence: the Hungry Teenager had woken and would not rest again until satisfied.

"Grrruuumble!" roared the stomach of the beast in the silent shadows of the room.

Sitting cross-legged in the middle of the mattress still swathed in blankets, Lucas blinked his sleepy blue eyes blearily, trying to use the lively dancing flames in the stove as a landmark to orient his distorted perceptions.

"Grrruuumble!" was heard again, tearing the peaceful silence asunder like the shriek of devils at war.

"Ooooh! That was me! Eh, eh, eh…" The teenager muttered sheepishly as he wrapped both arms around his midsection, embarrassed by the expressive noise his tummy made. "Well, it's seven in the evening like I planned. I can take about 45-odd minutes in the tub to warm up and get cleaned before going for dinner in the salon car. A nice warm meal served by a friendly face should help set things on pace for the evening before the line transfer around eleven tonight.

"Rooooaaarrr!" protested the empty stomach, not liking THAT plan one bit. It was completely void and wanted filled right away, not in the near future.

Lucas poked his belly with an interrogative index, not completely awake yet, and asked quite amused at his own silliness "Are you trying to veto my plan? You're just a minor organ, you know? Not like the brain or important stuff that matters…” He quipped while blinking his eyes in a vain attempt to clear out the sleep-crud and get some bearings before moving out of the bed.

"Aaaar rgg ghhh!" protested the stomach, voicing the teenaged rebellion that Lucas never allowed himself to show in public. "Roowwr." It completed its elaborate argument in favor of sustenance as the stunned adolescent decided then and there that he obviously wasn't an evening person any more than a morning person. In fact, he just now realized that anytime he just woke up from more than a 30 minute cat-nap was always going to end up weird for him and the people around.

"Maaawwrr." Agreed the empty organ in his belly, quite satisfied that its point had been conceded.

As he made his way to the bathroom for a quick do-over of his face and hair, the young man honestly wondered about the amount of RPG’s, fantasy and Sci-Fi that he went through in the last year. He had heard about people listening to their 'gut feeling' but, seriously people, having a conversation with your abdomen like it had an alien larvae or ghost inside surely wasn't indicative of a healthy mind.

"Nooorr?" queried the over-active stomach.

"Shut up, you… I'm trying to do some deep thinking here…” Lucas answered automatically without actually thinking anything since he was still half-asleep as he sat on the toilet to relieve himself.
After a short ten minute wash-up, Lucas was now fully dressed again and opening his carry-on luggage to pull out the business-casual style jacket he had bought to match his present brown-toned outer clothing. It even had some youthful leather details at the rims of the pockets, collar, lower hem, and sleeve cuffs that fit nicely with his brown leather hiking boots and accessories. Clothes shopping wasn't his favorite activity in life but it was nice once in a while to spend some money on his appearance. Especially since he wasn't much to look at to begin with; he was too young, too thin, too light-weight and too bony / wiry and so on…

Yeah, his therapist did say he had body-image problems, with severe self-loathing and relationship avoidance issues due to all the violence he had endured from so many diverse parties. He really needed to find another shrink on the northern side of things. Too much time without help in human form would lead to other episodes of gut-talk, and not all when he just woke up.

Shrugging on the jacket, he filled his pockets with his necessities then went out in search of a hot meal and humanoid interaction. At this point, he'd even take a smarmy little prepubescent 12 year old with a severe case of 'me-ism' over the silence bouncing around in his head. Plus, he needed to do something to take his mind off the information from the UEO queries he had running on his multiple bots. The results of THOSE would not be happy circumstances, he could feel it. Which meant of course that he would have to devote a few more hours to the Internex searches before switching trains in Seattle, no matter how tired he was after his meal.

As the young man left the cabin, he didn't see the flashing icon on the desktop of his laptop because the thing was blacked out in secured sleep-mode. If he had set an alarm or reminder signal of some sorts, he would realize that he had forgotten something important like the open web channel. Instead, he would discover it when he reactivated the station after his evening meal during his small bit of work time before preparations for the scheduled layover and train switch. By that time, it would be too late to rectify his mistake in full.

Ten minutes of slow careful walk had him entering the dining car again, although it was much fuller this time around as people preferred the evening meal for socializing rather than morning. The first sensation that he felt as he entered the dining compartment was peace. The lights were glowing softly from inside decorative brackets set on the outer walls between the tall windows, giving a discrete calmness to the atmosphere instead of the harsh neon lights usually favored by restaurants. Each table had a small candle lit in a colored glass jar as a centerpiece and the boy could see that all empty places had their placemats, flatware and linen napkins set; ready to welcome any walk-in guests without delay.

Giving the steward at the drinks bar a shy friendly smile, he accepted the offered glass of cool lemonade with lime slice and mint leaves before walking around to find a table for himself. As luck would have it, there was a nice little two-seater next to the shelving rack holding all the paper magazines and newspapers for the guests to use during their stay. Setting his glass down to mark his seat, Lucas browsed the collection of periodicals and newsprint's until he settled on a pair of newspapers from five days ago: the National Post (Canada) and The Seattle Times (USA). Sitting down with the window on his left so he faced forward into the movement of the train, he spread out the Times to glean at the front page curiously. Normally, the teenager got his news via television or the Internex, in both cases CNN, Bloomberg News and Washington Post were his basic go-to along with the local media outlets around Stanford so he could be alert to any situations in his immediate
vicinity.

Slowly sipping the ice-chilled lemonade as he idly read the pages, Lucas didn't feel any hurry to signal the wait-staff just yet. Honestly, he was still a bit drowsy from waking up and it happened that his nap had been far too short for his liking. Back at his office/home he would actually still be asleep until around nine in the evening when he would become active for a long night of remotely fixing people's network problems. This traveling around at weird hours of the day was bothersome for him as he was discovering himself to be a creature of very strongly entrenched habits that didn't like those habits changed. Meh! He'd get used to it. Maybe if he lived by day a bit more and walked away from his keyboard every now and then, he could see more people than some cheesy IM avatars on screen.

The adolescent’s ruminations were interrupted by the friendly male waiter who offered him a clean leather-bound paper menu with photos and descriptions of the meals available tonight. After showing the young adult his boarding pass to identify which travel package he had paid for, the teenager perused the menu calmly. The hunter's choice for meat was diverse cuts of Vermont wild boar and the fisherman's catch of the day was Canadian Pacific salmon with the usual alternate options of pan-seared chicken breast or a well garnished vegan meal. Feeling adventurous, he ordered a piece of boar in the King's roast style with peppercorn sauce and trimmings along an extra oven baked garlic bread to accompany his soup. The waiter chatted a bit with him, asking if he liked his trip to date, what he thought about the way the salon car was set up and such. After a few minutes of quiet small talk, the man went to place the order, leaving Lucas to his newspapers.

Halfway through an interesting article about precious maple wood theft from public forests and private properties in the northern reaches of Washington State (Who knew there was such thing?) the waiter brought the first service. Lucas folded the paper so as to be able to keep reading, tucking it on the far side of the table and placing the extra knife and fork of the unused place-set to keep it in position. The soup was a slow-cooked peasant style composed of thick hearty beef chunks, rice, barley and vegetables that went incredibly well with the just-baked garlic bread's melted cheese. Savoring each spoonful, the adolescent kept reading the article at a slow pace, mostly out of idle curiosity than any real sense of usefulness. It was weird that people were willing to cut down (it's a form of poaching?) trees they didn't own but going as far as being armed while doing so and shooting at people to get away when caught was several milestones past where he could understand the situation.

Yes, he knew that artists paid a heavy premium to get just the right type of wood roundel, branch, root or burr to make their creations and a good piece of fresh tree could bring in several thousand dollars, but to shoot and kill people over it? Apparently it was a bad situation that had festered for years since the late 1980's and now there had been a shootout two weeks ago that resulted in two perpetrators dead, two more grievously injured, one state trooper dead with another losing use of the right arm for the rest of his life. All over about 20,000$ of big-leaf maple cut into a dozen blocks barely the size of shoe boxes. The sheer idiocy of living off such petty crime didn’t compute in Lucas’s head since he was used to working with Wise Apothecary & Chemists, Wolenbahn, Stanford University Development Corporation, multiple municipal councils and the monstrously huge thingie called 'The World Bank' from an early age and the money amounts he saw flash before his eyes every day were in the millions and billions with the odd trillion when inter-governmental transactions were at stake. Such bloody strife over mere hundreds was just too foreign, too far removed from his lived experience for his usually gentle, altruistic nature to comprehend.

Having finished his appetizers, he folded the financial section and moved to the arts & culture. The Seattle area was quite active all year long and several nice theater groups were advertising performances. Even the community college students' charitable recital of the much lauded 'The Barber of Seville' sung in actual Italian as the original script looked inviting with its complimentary
cup of chilled eggnog and slice of huge Yule log cake made by the students of the cooking, restauration and hospitality department. Lucas was always attracted to live performances since he had so few human interactions at all in his life. For television and films he could stay at home in front of his monitor and surf channels at will but a stage-play or acrobatic performance had the benefits of humanity without the risks of close contact with anybody in the crowd so he could go there safely.

Yes, the teenager though blithely morose, he really needed that therapist in a hurry and a trial date for his immigration status ASAP to finally put those damned depressive mood swings and paranoid nightmares behind him. Thankfully, the waiter arrived with his main course, the large covered plate helping to keep the delicacy warm from the kitchen to the table. After switching out the soiled dishes for the meal, the young adult offered Lucas the usual options of sea-salt, coarse black pepper or parmesan cheese to sprinkle over his side dish of chef’s salad. The teenager accepted all three since the balsamic reduction vinaigrette was good but not his preferred taste; a bit of condiments would help that. Taking the time to smell the delicious aromas, he inspected the meal in detail. The principal element was three thick slices of meat taken from the boar’s forward flank and roasted in the oven before a good pass on live flames with small forest mushrooms and pickled pearl onions. Next to that were a handful of skinless boiled baby potatoes, a nice little trio of green asparagus grilled with herbed olive oil and a ladle of pilaf rice with the aforementioned chef’s salad presented in a separate bowl to keep it cold and crisp.

Taking up the classy sculpted deer antler handled meat knife, the young man dug into his roast meat with gusto such as only a starving teen could accomplish. Given how rarely he ever indulged in large heavy meals of this sort, he planned on enjoying all of it without shame or afterthoughts. He just hoped he had enough space for dessert after it all. The tenderly roasted meat was heavenly and the peppercorn sauce was just spicy enough to elevate the boar without getting overly savory or salty. The small quantities of sides were just fine given the size of the soup and salad given along the main element. In reality, the whole thing was balanced so that the diner would in fact have enough space left to taste one of the exquisite custom desserts accompanied by a specialty coffee or alcoholic liquor to help digestion.

As the main course progressed well, and without interruptions or problems from other guests, Lucas finished the Seattle Times and switched over to the canadian paper National Post. The thing was touted as the expression of nationalist, federalist, business-minded and often right-of-center economic movers and shakers of Canada from coast-to-coast. The tone of articles tried for an elevated cultured approach to imitate the New York Times but there was an undertone of snottiness, self-satisfaction and self-adulation that felt like a watered down version of Fox News Online or more closely USA Today which Lucas read a few times here and there.

As the youth made a valiant effort to process his meal (yeah, snort!) he read through the paper's political columns about the lasting effects of the Trump trade embargo on - what else in the north? – the lumber trade and the exports of processed construction softwood to the USA and other countries around the Pacific area. Scratching at his head in wonder, the boy could only marvel at just how much a fuss people above a certain parallel made about trees and woods and lumber. Had he lived under a blasted rock all these years to not be aware of this? Even when he had been a child in Buffalo in New York State, which had some pretty nice forests of its own to brag about, the subject of lumber and wood products had rarely gone beyond how many logs to put in the oven to warm up the pot of hot chocolate.

The waiter came by to make certain, for the fourth time in fact, that his young guest was tended to properly and satisfied about his food. He also refilled the glass of iced water, picked up the empty salad bowl right away and asked Lucas if he wanted to order his dessert and drink now or later after he was done. Making a big show of his own weirdness, Lucas answered gamely that he would consult his boss, to whit he patted his belly and responded "Yuppp, gimme another half-hour and I'll
order the last course then. Thanks." The waiter chuckled in amusement commenting that his
granddad, father and two uncles had the same decisional process about their meals as well, so he was
well aware of how that usually went: with extra portions!

Concentrating back on his meal and paper, the adolescent slowly polished off every last little bit of
meat and vegetable left despite it being a bit on the tepid side. He spent a good ten more minutes just
to finish the last pages of the newspaper before placing his utensils in the plate to signify he was done
with the course then waited for the waiter to pass by. A quick chat about dessert options had Lucas
choose a confectionery indulgence of great luxury: a five-fruit curd pie with meringue and whipped
cream along a nice irish coffee. The hot drink was made with a specialty non-alcoholic liquor much
beloved of people who could not be served alcohol like teens or had medical conditions that meant
cutting off any alcohol they might have drunk in the past.

The young man asked the waiter to mark his spot while he excused himself to the washroom as he
didn't want to move emplacements for his dessert when he returned. The older male took out a small
black plastic rectangle from his vest pocket which was then set up leaning against the candle bowl
centerpiece. The phrase "I will return soon" was written in bold white characters, clearly visible to
any who walked by the table thus settling the problem. Satisfied, Lucas used his cane and carefully
walked off to the bathroom after checking that he had all his pocket fillers well in place and
accounted for.

In reality, other than the quick trip to the urinal, he really wanted to take a walk to stretch his legs to
restore circulation and flexibility. If he'd been in his office, he would have done a short quarter hour
routine of exercises just after waking up from his night's regular sleep but the moving, swaying
motions of the train car had made his eyes lose focus after a miserable little quad of push-ups. Since
he wasn't the best athlete alive and had no desire to enter competitions of any sorts, he had quite
naturally taken the excuse and aborted his minimalist routine for some screen time. Some sitting
down on a well cushioned, warm and welcoming chair type of time. Hence why he felt a small bit of
antsiness after a long day of almost nil physical movement other than bringing food to his mouth.
That the short walk would give him the opportunity to wash his hands and splash his face with warm
water again was a decent incentive to stand up for some movements of his own.

He had not needed to use the public washroom of the dining hall this morning and was a bit curious
as to how it was laid out. As it happened, the setup consisted of three small completely separate
rooms accessed from the corridor just outside the exit on the near side of the car, close to the drinks
bar where he normally entered the salon. Two rooms were 'normal' sized but the third was double-
spaced for access to wheelchairs, walkers, baby strollers or persons with crutches needing assistance.
And still, the smaller stalls had nice clean stainless steel help handlebars bolted to the walls around
the toilet and vanity to give people, like himself, with unsteady balance or lacking dexterity some
easy steady support all over the room.

After finishing his business and wash-up in the relaxing privacy of the cozy wood-paneled little
room, he adjusted his hair by giving his head a good shake to let the blond locks fall into place then
carded both hands through to untangle the mass of golden strings. Now satisfied both physically and
mentally, he made his way back to his semi-isolated little table. He came back just in time to see the
waiter bring his slice of chilled pie and steaming hot drink. As he sat back in his chair, the boy could
only marvel at the fluorescent coloration of the five clearly different layers of the fruit curd. The thing
was about two inches and a half thick including the golden sable pastry and the sixth layer on top of
ivory white meringue. The whipped cream was in a small shallow but wide bowl on the side of the
pie slice. Thinking this dessert was invented by a hippie of the 1960's that enjoyed his retirement in
Hawaii way too much, Lucas forked up a large bite which he chewed with vigor, especially when
the multiple refreshing fruit flavors hit his tongue. With a sip of coffee every now and then, it was
truly a magnificent combination.
After polishing off his plate like a boy who hadn't eaten anything all day, Lucas leaned backwards into his chair, holding the cup of warm coffee between both hands to absorb some of the warmth to soothe his poor meatless fingers. Eyes closed, he allowed himself to rest a bit, enjoying the noises of humanity over the background of rolling and swaying that were constant companions in the massive vehicle. The movement of a person nearby made him open his eyes and focus while reflexively preparing to throw the almost empty cup and saucer at the intruder. Bitterly painful experience of this type had taught him to strike first and apologize only if needed. It was only the waiter, back with the small wooden tray holding the invoice for his meal. Just as he had that morning, Lucas looked over the items and prices indolently as it was all included in his arrangement. He took out his boarding pass to manually write the client number and sign the papers with his heavy titanium tactical pen which caught the eye of the server who kept quiet despite his curiosity. After closing the transaction, the young man left to retreat back to his cabin where he still had some work to process through before the train change at around 11:00pm.

Evening dreariness

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Wednesday 16th of December, 2020; 21:12pm

Amtrak train, VIP cabin

Washington State, USA

Walking into his cabin, the first thing Lucas did was to check that his luggage and laptop were as they had been placed when he left. Now completely assured nobody had rifled through his possessions in his absence, he lifted the computer's monitor and began the activation sequence. Allowing the CPU to wake up, the teen went to his baggage to take off his jacket and unneeded accessories to store them securely for the coming transfer. He also needed to take out his brand new winterized long trenchcoat in preparation for the snowy mess of a climate he would face in Seattle and then Vancouver a dozen hours after. Since the linkup to Canada was offered only as regular coach class without any private seating option, he wanted everything stowed and tight before the move in just two hours.

His mellow thoughts were interrupted by the low toned pinging sound of an alarm coming from his laptop on the other side of the room. Frowning interrogatively, he moved around the bed, tracking a lazy hand over the bed covers as he walked towards the new mess that he needed to deal with. Now seated in his chair, facing towards the front of the train, he concentrated on the monitor to figure out what exactly had caused the bell to sound off. It took a minute to find the culprit; the reduced little icon stashed away in the activity bar at the bottom of the screen.

Clicking on the icon to enlarge the app window to full size, Lucas swore roundly and loudly when he saw that it was the secret direct connection to WPP's archival server that he had forgotten about closing. The damned program had been running for almost nine hours straight, leaving an open port through his outer defenses that a hacker could backtrack to locate him. Thankfully, Lucas had set his communications software so that any outgoing Internex channel went through four inner firewalls, a seven-chambered dump and four outer firewalls before leaving the laptop's network controller for a merry bounce-around running through five thousand anonymous zombie-bots spread in ninety countries before it finally reached the entry point of WPP's private secured intranet through the old and forgotten service backdoor built into the main management server.

Finding his actual location in real time would be both onerous and lengthy. Only someone with time, equipment and know-how would have any chance at all of retracing his hack back to the mobile workstation he used. Given the quality of the infiltration programs and quantity of subterfuges and
decoys he employed during any illicit activity, those difficulties exponentialized. Still; he made a mistake due to his stress, anxieties and the fear he felt when he saw the data about William Noyce and US Naval Intel being in bed with Lawrence. Anybody could be excused for having a bad reaction to finding out that they had the most secretive and most criminally inclined of all the military intel branches of the US armed services running after them.

As he silently berated himself for five kinds of fool, Lucas put himself to the task of fully powering the outgoing connection then selecting and queuing the analytics apps needed to diagnosticate what had happened to his wayward signal during his absence. The first results returned were not good. Since he had only done the initiation phase of the link, most of the protection and defenses he normally applied had been dormant. On the plus side, since all the connection did was 'ping' the WPP server to see if it was present and active for a remotely requested job, nothing really big in the sense of detection and firewall had triggered in response. Not from them, anyways.

What was worrisome was that somebody had managed to tag his link-up effort and send back a tracer bug along with a small AVI (animated video imagery) file that was obviously a message of some sorts destined to whoever had hacked WPP’s administrative server's backdoor. Amusingly enough, the tracer and message were both stuck between the first and second outer firewalls of his defensive scheme. The teenager took about a half hour to paralyze, disable and decrypt the tracer before huffing out in irritation.

"I got tagged by a friggin' Skript Kiddie! Oh, the shame!" Snort! "Well, no, not truly…"

Shaking his head in amusement at his bad luck, as well as the ineptitude of his would-be attacker, Lucas pouted playfully in mock offense at being tracked by such a low-level amateur using some of the cheapest, and oldest, bugging software available as open-source code on the dark web. The thing had been selling for around 20$ USD since before Lucas even touched his first keyboard! Talk about 'retro' engineering a problem! Eh!

A bit more fiddling with the bug had it reveal its secrets; it had none! The program in its current configuration was essentially 99% the original source with only the parameters of the client/user and a ghost bot-net routing scheme to send the data from Lucas's machine to the spy at the other end. Whoever was attempting to hack him had done the most minimal job and practically no effort about it so that meant it was either a very young beginner or a rather old amateur trying a few tricks out of curiosity. Grabbing a pretzel from the bag on the table, the boy chewed pensively as he contemplated the rows of codes that spoke only to those truly gifted with programming and networking tech.

Sighing, he cracked his fingers on both hands then began to type commands for a series of back-tracking apps and activated separately a suite of server diagnostics and maintenance tools that he had created and customized during the last six years of his life as he attended Stanford. The tools would be even more useful than with other systems as he had already infiltrated and set in place the 'watcher' part of the apps to do silent surveillance over WPP's comms traffic, bandwidth, signal strength, data streams and logging user & visitor activities for his own perusal when needed.

And now he needed access to all that aggregated maintenance data.

Just a few minutes of patience saw the WPP server kindly dump to his secondary remote receiver-bot all the overwatch data he wanted, up-to-date as of 32 seconds ago. A short command saw the receiving bot begin to process the data through a series of preset filters and analytics then send forward to Lucas only the report of the results through a few bounces around the VPN of bots to lose any tails or bugs the raw data may have carried into the reception machine. Since the report arrived much faster than the back-trace he was running on the 'bug' trapped in his defensive layers, he opened it and figured out quickly what had happened.
He got 'spoofed' – meaning his signal was hijacked for use by somebody else.

Some little bastard placed right on the doorway to WPP server's communications links a trap-app that emulates the actual entry portal of the system thus everything in or out gets copied back to its boss while also tagged and followed to its point of origin. At that point the hacker decides what to do with the contact; infiltration, data theft, sabotage, extortion, etc…

A stupid Skript Kiddie had managed to tag & ping his connection with almost no effort or tech to speak of! Groaning in actual embarrassment, Lucas rubbed his forehead with a weary hand. If he had been static in his office with all his machines and connections at full strength there wouldn't be any problems with cleaning the systems and then going after the little wannabe spoofer. Since he was actually mobile and most of his important devices and signal amplifiers were all packed up in a UPS truck over the borderline already, the situation was less than optimal. That didn't mean it was irreparable, though. It would simply take more time and effort to get the result then back-trace the little thug back to his lair to lay a cybernetic beating on his systems.

The adolescent decided to give himself a pause in the bathroom to use the facilities before taking up what would be his last cup of coffee aboard the train. Soon, he would have to complete his departure preps and wait peacefully by his window for the vehicle to stop then sound the bell that signaled the all-clear to disembark passengers. After relieving his needs, the young man tried to blank his mind as he washed his hands and splashed a little bit of warm water in his face to help wake himself up for the layover but it didn't seem to be happening.

When he stood by the wood stove while fixing his last mug, the teen wondered if this minuscule trouble was worth the waste of his last minutes of luxurious travel. Exhaling a loud sigh, he decided that yes, the little retard on the other end of the tracer was worth impacting his life and emotional balance so much. Sitting down again by the window for a last bit of programming, Lucas set up automatisms in his laptop's comms suite and then in his bot-net's managers to recognize and send to a chosen chamber of his 'dump' any connections, links or files emanating from the URL’s, email addresses and smartphone ID's that were listed in the bug's MASTER/user configuration module. This meant that Lucas could now spend the next few days in peace as any junk sent by the minion on the other end of the line would automatically be sent into his virtual seven-chambered dumping buffer and vegetate there until picked up for analysis and disposal.

Cracking the knuckles of both hands, the teenager decided to give an hour of time to this problem before completing his layover preparations. After decompiling the monitoring data gathered by the surveillance apps he had surreptitiously implanted into WPP so many years ago, Lucas was able to start the trace, following the virtual spoor back along a barely protected channel composed of amateurishly programmed bots serving as listening posts and data storage checkpoints. Whoever had configured these had very limited skills and comprehension of what was possible with computer equipments. That meant the hacker was only a programmer, not a circuitry or network engineer, which meant that he was severely disadvantaged compared to Lucas who understood every aspect from the metal in the chipsets to the motherboard in the servers to the types of cable connections to the protocols running the whole system. His fundamental knowledge and experience at manipulating the parts in his own hands would give him a long edge over this little wannabe. It took only 5 minutes to backtrack the signal to the rough area of the Houston metropolitan zone in Texas.

The Houston city public networks infrastructures were badly damaged by a series of successive tornadoes and catastrophic floodings in 2017, 2018, 2019 and just this passed August 2020 again. The city's wide metropolitan area local climate patterns had begun changing towards wetter, windier and stormier ecosystems but nobody in either their capital Austin or Washington DC wanted to admit it. That meant that they were stupidly trying to repair public utilities that would just get destroyed year after year, no matter they did the job well or cheaply. The disorganized situation had given some
enterprising little weasel the opportunity to exploit the multiple systemic failures (holes) caused by 
the storm damages that were then worsened when so many contractors working with little central 
coordination created further weaknesses with technology & protocol disparities between the systems 
they repaired with poorly compatible parts and programs.

These openings, old and new, were the roadway that had allowed the amateur hacker to worm into 
the wires and access the deeper sectors of the networks without getting caught by the governmental 
broadcasting authority or the private cyber-cops working for big companies like Symantec or Google 
among others. In regular conditions, like New York city for example, such an individual with limited 
skills and formation would never have managed to bypass the network watchdogs well enough to 
dodge the NYPD'S computer crimes task force nor the FBI's cyber-terrorism division. In Houston 
though, even the cops at all levels and localities were calling out for help and materials to rebuild. 
Since all their able-bodied officers were patrolling the streets, that left precious few to survey the 
networks, hence the exponential rise in identity theft and malicious hacking in their zone.

Now that he had circled the approximate origin of his hacker on the map, Lucas realized he needed 
to watch the dumb video to figure out who or what he was dealing with. He was 95% certain in 
advance that it would be some sort of extortion scheme like telling the listener he had caught a 
'crypto-locker' virus of some sort and needed to pay a one-time fee in coins on the Dark Web to get 
the key to reactivate his system. The chances of it being something else was there but small. Looking 
at the clock, the teenager realized though that he was out of time. He had a half hour left to set his 
baggage in order for the train switch, he would have to exorcise this vermin from his life later during 
the overnight or morning portions of the northern ride.

With the final defensive processes in place to hold off any further attacks or spying for the next three 
days easily, Lucas did one last sweep of his social media management suite, purged another batch of 
crap from his email boxes and then did a complete shut-down of the machine. After verifying that 
every comm line and port was properly closed off and inert, this time around.

Charging ahead

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Wednesday 16th of December, 2020; 23:04pm

Amtrak train, VIP cabin

Seattle City, Washington State, USA

Worried flint-blue eyes scanned the crowds through the clear glass of the window. There was a fair 
few people assembled on the quay, waiting for the vehicle to immobilize so they could come aboard, 
welcome passengers coming off or exchange fresh cargo for empty crates and sacks. The entire 
scene seemed ordinary but Lucas had never really traveled before and only experienced the one 
boarding event back in California.

Exhaling a breath of worry, he tested the belt around the waist of his trenchcoat and placed the also 
brand new fedora style hat on his head, giving himself the appearance of an upscale young man from 
a well endowed family who was traveling through the Christmas season on familial affairs. He 
checked again that his new calf skin winter gloves were in the deep side-pockets of the coat then he 
fluffed and readjusted the new thick merino felt scarf at his neck. The steady fall of white powdery 
stuff outside the train didn't seem all that welcoming to him.

When he left Stanford the thermometer indicated a comfortable 80-something Fahrenheit. Now it 
was close to -5, well below freezing. Why again did he think traveling up north in winter was a good
"Sucks to be me!" the boy grumped good-naturedly as he blew on his thin meatless fingers to warm them up a bit. Just looking out the window was making him shiver in dread at the waiting cold.

The sound of the train's traditional metallic bell startled him out of his reverie as the vehicle completed its parking routine in dock at the Seattle Station. Barely a minute later the conductor's voice emitted from the speakers spread around to warn all passengers to disembark and make their connections as the train would spend several hours in maintenance before switching rails for its return trip down the West Coast back to the Mexican Border. As he had almost two hours to reach his new train, Lucas decided to give the other passengers some time to walk around and leave before making his own way to the baggage claims.

Ten minutes later, a steward knocked on the door, asking for permission to enter. Calling out to the man that he could come in, the teenaged migrant looked around one last time then trudged to the door, assisted by his cane, as the panel opened from outside. Giving the servant a nod of the head and some soft words of thanks for the easy, luxurious trip, Lucas began the laborious process of changing vehicles in the middle of holiday rush.

Finding his checked baggage near the box cars was easy. He just activated the tracking RF tags he had placed long ago in all his affairs so he could chase them via a web-based app accessed through any Internex connection. Now having on his phone screen the five small compasses showing where each was, he clicked off the pointers for the over-night bag, briefcase, laptop and smartphone as he had them already. He only had to find his one big wheeled trunk, then the new train. That was easy, especially with the big golden logo of his company Wolenbahn Electronics Inc on both sides of the large aluminum trunk. He showed his boarding pass and passport to the porter in charge of handing out the bags to their proper owners and took hold of the wheeled contraption for his trek around the station. A quick aside out of pedestrian traffic saw his heavy over-night bag sitting on top of the horizontal trunk, attached to the case by extension ropes through the metallic brackets specifically built onto the trunk for this purpose to keep the piled-up bags from falling off during movement.

With his heavy baggage now set for prolonged walking, Lucas checked again that his briefcase was securely resting on his right hip with the strap across his chest to avoid grab-&-run attacks that so often plagued these sorts of public places. He had to fight off such attempts on his laptop and briefcase about once a month back at Stanford whenever he left his office to attend exams, do class presentations or meet with clients in restaurants. The problem with American society at this date was the quantity of endemically, miserably poor people who had no hopes for a better future. They were rendered jobless due to permanent health issues or worse, the country's habit of jailing its poorest citizens with barely-valid reasons. That stupidity of abusively sending the cops when social services should be deployed had the result of killing off the futures of many who suffered this at critical junctures of their lives, sometimes before they even left high school. With so much poverty and necessity, many were driven to the unthinkable to survive. This meant that small weak people like Lucas had to be extra careful when moving alone around public places lest he be scoped as a potential victim that couldn't fight back.

Grunting at the effort of dragging his luggage around and once again castigating himself for his sedentary, nonathletic lifestyle which he promised to change soon (Snort! Yeah, buddy! When?) the youth trudged his miserably cold way through the snow accumulated on the quays and the milling crowds that just didn't seem to thin out despite the hour. Pulling his luggage with his left hand, he used his most ordinary cane with the right hand to lean on and give himself some help when straining against the snow patches. He really wished he could at least have his real armament cane in hand.
instead of keeping it stowed in the trunk until passed the border lines. It would make him feel more secure about trekking through this rushing, eclectic chaos if he could grip the sharp steel as he walked about the unknown train station. It was coming to 23:45pm, damn it all! Didn't all these odd folk have places to be other than in his way? Lucas was not normally this grumpy and aggressive but the weather, late hour and low-grade lancing pains in both legs ever since he had left the Amtrak wagon were not helping to keep his mood stable or nice.

Finally, he managed to emerge from the massive mess of travelers long enough to see that the foot traffic was directed mainly towards the exits leading to the parking lots and bus lines. The quantity of people aiming for the northern train line was quite lesser than he would have thought. Then again, in this day of rushing everything, trains were seen as fit only for cargo or vacations, not speedy movement towards your business meetings or family Christmas party. People ignorantly preferred airplanes for those relatively non-critical, non-rush activities, not realizing just how long the waiting lines were at the customs counters and security checkpoints in airports since the New York attacks tumbled the Towers in 2001. Honestly, for anything not a medical, rescue or police transport, airplanes were not necessary and trains were a much better option; they had more leg room, sleeping cabins and restaurant cars so you weren't stuck in your seat during 14 to 24 hours at the risk of developing skin sores and cramps in dormant limbs.

Happy now that he wouldn't drown in the rushing crowds anymore, and feeling a little less anxious too, Lucas took in a deep fortifying breath of cold air and started up his walk again, the tension in his left arm and shoulder annoying him as he dragged the dead weight of his luggage. He cheered silently as he managed to reach the enclosed portion of the station as it meant he would no longer be fighting against the piled-up snow for each step he marched and his aching frozen legs would strain a lot less to keep him upright. Once in, he looked above the heads of the crowds, searching for the information boards to confirm he was headed the right way.

Yes! To the right! Marching again on his 3-legged hobbling gait, but much more freely this time, he processed through the long lines of thickly dressed travelers who were all similarly burdened with luggage, sacks, purses and several pets in carriers except for a few dogs held solidly on leash. Because of all the holiday overcrowding and a pause midway to assuage his paranoid anxiety about his luggage, it took almost twenty minutes to reach the Via Rail service counter where he would register and check in his heavy trunk before boarding the link up north.

Thankfully, the high class package he had paid allowed him to go into the "VIP-Express" line which was much shorter and was processed faster by the railway personnel. He showed his USA passport and Blue Cross insurance card at the counter as an extra ID since it had a photo. Once the paperwork done, he received the Via Rail boarding pass with the information for the WiFi client access and the seat he had specifically paid extra to obtain as it was the next best alternative to an enclosed cabin that the coach class could offer.

Despite now having an hour to wait, Lucas chose to make for the train already, deciding that he would rather wait in the warm wagon rather than the not frigid but definitely not hot train station. Since he would have barely fifty minutes if he chose the option, going into the VIP lounge to order a hot snack then speed-eating it just wasn't appealing. With the rich, heavy meal from the Amtrak salon still well in mind, there wasn't any real desire to eat or drink either. If he was going to wait, he might as well go straight to his assigned seat and set himself up with a video game on his laptop or even just get to sleep right away so he could be awakened easily for the border check-up in four hours.

Lugging his carry-on and aluminum briefcase, the teen marched at medium pace towards the new vehicle, thankful he wouldn't be exposed to the cold and snow for more than a few minutes while he
got aboard his wagon. The porters actually asked him to board by the nearest access then search for his seat from the inside as the stewards would guide him faster that way. It only took five minutes to walk, find and claim his seat.

In coach style, most of the wagons were filled with forward-looking large thickly padded seats that had only limited reclining space. However, if you asked the travel agent or the train line pros, you would be told of the small sector at the very back of the wagon near the bathrooms and emergency supplies closet that was composed of two booths, one on each side of the center aisle, with the utilities between them and the door going off to the next wagon.

These booths were composed of an adjustable, fully folding table and four seats facing inside to the table for group activities like meals and games. It was rare for somebody to demand to be specifically reserved a seat at those tables because of the traffic with the washrooms and the fact they were usually kept free for general usage during the voyage to allow people with mobility problems to eat in comfort instead of being stuck in their assigned seat with the small folding table hidden in the armrest like in a cinema chair. Also, those booths were the only spot in each wagon that had physical network cable and electricity sockets for business travelers to connect their mobile devices on the move.

While the power and network setup was important to Lucas, the option to unfold the table and work manually on paper while eating a snack or having his coffee at hand had helped him to decide for one of those rarely asked booth reservations. Plus, he would meet a few people as they moved around and used the free portions of the table. Traveling the 11 hours or so between Seattle and Vancouver in coach would be hard on everybody; it would certainly be a drain on his stamina and patience. Thankfully, coach-class on a train was a lot better than a Greyhound bus since they wouldn't have the annoying start-and-stop motions of heavy traffic roads or the sudden dips and climbs that followed the landscape. Trains ran a much smoother tempo on relatively flat runs thus making it easy to sleep away the distance or concentrate on your monitor or food, ignoring the outside and the wagon's innards too.

The steward standing in the wagon's access point guided him directly to the booth on the quay side of the car, just on the right hand of the aisle. Lucas placed his carry-on and briefcase in the overhead bin then worked on taking off his hat, gloves and trenchcoat while watching attentively as a few other passengers walked in and did their own preparations for the long night. He kept the cane besides himself, lodged in the small space between the seat's armrest and the wagon's outer wall. Once freed of his heavy constrictive winter clothing, the young male sat in the window-side chair which was the one he paid for. All he had left to do was find something to do for the next hour until departure or just let himself fall to sleep right away.

The steward took a minute to come place a small wooden plaque saying "reserved seat" on the table next to Lucas while explaining it would keep more boisterous individuals from trying to strong-arm him out of his chair as had happened in the past when big families or vacation groups came aboard and absolutely refused to separate for meal times. Such hostile events were rare but better be safe, especially since the adolescent planned to sleep through the night without issue.

The going gets tough

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Wednesday 16th of December, 2020; 23:42pm

VIA Rail train, coach class

Seattle City, Washington State, USA
The boarding had been slow but then again, it gave Lucas plenty of quiet time to let himself drift into a more restive state. He was already deeply asleep in his reclined chair, covered by his trenchcoat with his fedora over his face to blot out the lights when the warning bell calling for final boarding sounded along the calls of the porters but neither managed to waken the exhausted youth from his oblivion.

The train left the station exactly on time without any complications to report. The steward walked up and down the aisle, offering warm drinks and premade sandwiches or salads to the travelers, many of which were too awake from the boarding rush to fall to sleep already. Some played on their smartphones or held a book to pass the time. A few others who voyaged as couples or small families held conversations at not so low tones but nobody was shouting or making a mess yet.

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 03:09am

USA / Canada border crossing

The first three hours of rail were blessedly quiet, without vehicular incidents or passengers acting out in the train somewhere. The canadian crews were old hands at getting this machine from Vancouver to Seattle and back, doing the trip every other day. With doubled tracks along the entire link, there was a train departing from Vancouver at about the same time as they left Seattle, they would cross mid-point then start over the next day and so on. There was a departure every day on this stretch of the tracks given just how many people and cargo moved between the two countries and airplanes could not manage the volume whilst the choppy seas made for hard sailing even for larger commercial ships. The only truly reliable method of transport in the northern corridor really was the train as it couldn't get jammed in a ditch, fall out of the sky from iced engines or get sunk by an iceberg or massive storm like waterborne craft.

With such steady management and reliable mechanics, the train made good progress northwards despite the relentless fall of snow through the night. The interruption at the border crossing was barely fifteen minutes long, as the US customs agents walked down the aisle with sniffer dogs, checking on the passports and boarding passes of the travelers, warning them that the Canadians would do the same on their side less than 200 yards across the actual border line. All passengers were warned yet again over the public address speakers to keep their papers in hand, and also to not have any firearms on themselves or their carry-on baggages as they could be detained for a more thorough inspection due to several types of guns and munitions being actually illegal in Canada. Also, since the Canadians had very severe laws concerning the owning and carrying of any firearm type and several knife models, having them anywhere but the checked bags could get you either pushed back to the US or even arrested and jailed.

The American side of the checkpoint was breezed through quickly as the agents were well trained and used to walking the trains daily in each direction. With nothing to hold them back, the vehicle was waved passed the raised barriers and up to the waiting northerners on the other side of the wide empty lane of cleared land that marked the physical borderline between the two giant countries.

The Canadian checkpoint had only a few differences from the US one. The agents had more color on their uniforms as the Americans wore all black & dark blue whilst here the red & white maple leaf flag was visible on shoulder pads and caps, the tops of gloves and even on the harnesses of the drug sniffing dogs. The truly glaring detail was the way the officers spoke to the passengers. The US guys had been all gruff and raw power in their presentation with just a hand held out and harsh "Papers!" but here the agents all wished the travelers "Welcome to Canada, may I see your documents?" Bienvenu au Canada, puis-je voir vos documents?" with at least a neutral face rather than the bullish
closed-off expression the guys south had worn. Several of the agents even spoke a chinese dialect to help the many elderly asian voyagers who were visiting relatives up north during the holiday season.

Lucas had been glad for the brusqueness of the american guards, it meant less interest in his person or business as the men were in a hurry to process them through the gates. The canadian customs agents were doing things slowly and methodically, taking time to open the passports and look at the face of the person handing up the documents. In at least a quarter of cases they also asked to see the boarding pass for reasons that the teen could not divine or hear.

As the officer and dog came to his emplacement, he noted the reserved sign on the table and well ensconced position of the passenger for prolonged sleep through the night. Becoming more polite with a small encouraging smile when he saw it was a kid, the male agent, white in his late thirties, asked gently to see the passport, boarding pass and if he had an extra piece of ID with photo like driver's license or insurance client card. Lucas frowned a bit at being singled out for extra attention since in his lived experience that never ended up good for his health.

The border guard took the documents offered and actually took the time to open and read each one, going so far as to scan them with a dedicated device that served to read bar codes, inventory RF tags and also capture still shots of any document of interest for a potential investigation. The man was frowning a bit as he checked the train line's ticket and boarding pass, seeing that Lucas was an unaccompanied minor traveling alone.

"Excuse me sir, I'm going to need complementary information to allow your passage." he asked politely as he saw the high quality clothes and coat the kid owned instead of the usual casual wear of vacationers and street rags a lot of teens seemed to favor even for school or family affairs.

The officer's instincts were telling him to tread carefully with a rich, well connected kid while the german sheppard was quietly sitting on the floor right next to the young person, his chin on the kid's knees while looking up at the boy's deep flint-blue eyes in canine curiosity. The policeman noticed right away that the young male wasn't even phased by the animal crowding into his personal space; if anything he seemed amused and a bit curious himself. The fact he actually smiled at the dog and extended his bare hand to let the canine sniff him to determine if he was friendly made a good impression on the adult. Usually passengers either waved off his four-legged companion or griped about getting fleas from a mutt. You could tell a lot of a person's general temper and character by how they react to a dog's attitude towards them and this kid seemed okay. He did however have a smell around him like he had applied some athletic ointment for muscle cramps recently; the odor of the wintermint used in the cream was rather distinctive.

With a great sigh of long suffering patience, the younger male asked in neutral polite tones 'What do you need? I don't have anything prohibited in my bags or on me, and I have all the proper papers to clear the crossing as was confirmed to me by both the US Department of Tourism and the Canadian Consulate in San Francisco where my booking was done. In fact, may I be informed as to why I need to hand out more when nobody else in the wagon was asked for such extensively detailed paperwork?"

The boy had been unfailingly polite and spoke in low non-threatening tones but the menace was there nonetheless; he knew he was being singled out and would not just let it happen quietly. The fact he had already began to pull out from under his legs a heavy armored briefcase to root out his other papers showed he was cooperating with the officer while also showing off, accidentally the agent was sure, the manila folders with the name and office logo of a lawyer in SF. Then another from lawyers in Buffalo. And a third from another law firm in New York city. Yeah, the message was clear.
With his case now open on the tabletop before him, Lucas began showing the custom's agent the documents that were prepared for such an eventuality. His travel agent had warned him that the border crossing was normally more intense at the country that you entered rather than the one you left so he had to be ready to explain all his travel arrangements as he was a kid traveling alone.

"Well officer, here is what I have to offer. These are my forms that were filed with the Canadian government in Ottawa to date. This is to petition for bi-national citizenship. This is for the obtention of 'investor migrant' status along with the World Bank's confirmation of opening new personal and corporate accounts carrying the mandated minimal balance of 500,000$ in cash to prove that I indeed have enough funds to qualify as a real corporate investor. These are the files to finalize the incorporation of the Canadian division of my existing company as well as the list of existing clients in each province and what they bought. This last one here is my medical file, put up to date two days ago before I left Stanford. You get to see that one only with a court warrant in hand, or proved due cause of concern before witnesses who will sign an affidavit to prove it. The RCMP cyber-crimes division is aware of my coming up and I have an appointment with them in the first week of January to offer further products and services as soon as I build my new offices and production facilities in BC."

The teenager's tone and manners had gone cold and refractive on mentioning is medical history. There were still many other files imprinted with both the Canadian flag and lawyer's ID in the case, but tied together and separated from the rest of the pile. The logos for the Ministry of Justice and Department of Immigration & Naturalization were on them, as well as markers of confidentiality and 'case under review'. Another pair of folders carrying UEO identifications and numbering from their department of finance and revenue was intriguing but clearly off limits. The batch of files with the World Bank logo marked 'web-2 protocols security committee' and 'inter-bank transactions surveillance' were ignored studiously by the policeman.

The border agent guessed that this passenger was well above his pay-grade and did only a cursory check of the proffered files. At a glance, both migration forms checked out as genuine and valid, if dated only in the last week, showing this to be a very recent spate of actions that led the boy here. On a hunch the agent snapped pictures of the forms' lead pages since they contained all the identities and occupations of the people concerned and which government departments were being called upon to act. After this he called his dog to follow him and left the wagon entirely as he was done with his search.

Lucas was left with an interrogative mien on his face as he put everything back in proper order so he could lock up the briefcase securely. He checked the papers, the laptop and travel brochures he had decided to keep on hand for when he reached Vancouver proper then closed up for the rest of the trip.

The long vehicle sounded its bell, telling the last people who needed off to clear out then a minute later the usual rumbling of the wheels on snowy metal rails was heard as the forward motion was felt through the carriage despite the suspensions and padded chairs. As the train pulled northward again, the blond teen was happy to have finally reached a country where he would be physically safer than anywhere on the vast majority of the Earth but he wondered what other problems he would encounter just because he was young and looked like an easy victim for people with badges or big arms to abuse without consequences against them.

Putting his vague overly anxious worries to rest, the boy covered up again to go back to sleep. When he woke up from the much needed slumber he'd be in a new city, in a new world and would process the situation as it was presented. No need to borrow trouble when things were going great for a
Cheap train ride up to Vancouver, dealing with the spoofer, thoughts about Canadian weapons laws and general cultures. Lucas does some private thinking about his ancestors, inherited wealth and the companies he built. Introduction to several of the weapons and cybernetic devices upon which Lucas has based his defense and sciences. Touring Vancouver a bit and the hotel complex. There's a boat load of money sloshing around and setting up remote warning systems while preparing for a long war of attrition. Discovering some of Lucas' higher learning and capacities. Lawrence attempts a transparent ploy to hurt his son and destroy any future or life he has.
The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

WARNING; the language level of this one will be almost mild instead of the usual street-trashy when we consider a story based on boats and sailors. However, as I always warn people who read my work: this language was pretty much normal in the school yard 30 years ago when I was a teenager. So, how can you have such a thin skin and be part of the same culture on the same continent if this is really that offensive to you? Where did you spend the last few decades, if you can’t take a few hard words from the mouths of kids when these words have been around since before World War I?

{ SQ } - { WARNING } - { SQ }

I have never been a lawyer or notary nor did I work in any paralegal or police job in my life; please don't take my storytelling as being 'legally binding' or valid in a court setting. Laws change, get added brand new or even get revoked (marijuana, anyone?) every year and the application does vary according to the policemen or crown attorneys you are dealing with and the 'political context' of the day in Parliament. Since I took my very basic knowledge of knife, gun, weaponry and self-defense laws on Wikipedia and official Government of Canada websites relating to the subjects, you should
try to find professional sources for a genuine advice.

Furthermore;

it's a historical truism that rich people with high contacts have SOME things easier but when it blows up it destroys their entire family. Poor people seemingly avoid the biggies but get stuck with every little hurdle since they can't afford decent legal advice. It's also a sad, disgusting fact of life in 2017 that there is still a lot of discrimination in daily life and being an English-speaking white man with blond hair and blue eyes will open you doors that will forever remain closed for others.

I do not support this reality, but it is the current reality in North America and I have to use the societal norms and culture in vigor to make the background of the story credible.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

THIRD CHAPTER; OH, CANADA!

Getting the cold shoulder (and everything else, too!)

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 05:52am

VIA Rail train, coach class

Southern British Columbia, Canada

Lucas yawned widely behind his hand then frowned at the hoarfrost lining the outside of the lower rim of the window besides his seat. Even wrapped in two layers of clothing plus his trenchcoat as a blanket, he still felt some of the cold seeping through the metal body of the train wagon despite its insulation and heating systems. Coughing forcibly to clear his throat and wake himself more, the boy blinked both eyes to clear the crud and refocus his bleary gaze on the shapes of the furniture and passengers inside the poorly lit interior of the vehicle. As they were just minutes before dawn, the train car was mostly wreathed in shadows and obscure forms, an occasional weak blue light at floor level offering just enough sight to walk without tripping or stepping on an item fallen off a sleeping passenger.

The teenager worked his jaw to undo a bit of a titch in the left side as he pivoted his neck side-to-side to get rid of a kink that seemed to enjoy his vertebra too much for his taste. Once he was fully awake, he reached for his cane and tapped it on the floor, shaking off his coat as he rose unsteadily on weak, barely responsive legs. Deciding to get himself some breakfast to have something to hold until the real meal after the train arrived in Vancouver, he checked all the security wires and locks that kept his carry-on and briefcase attached to their storage places. Once done, he began his slow trudge towards the salon car and the public bathrooms so he could relieve himself and splash some hot water on his hands and face to complete his wakefulness. A hot breakfast and coffee would be nice to keep him fed while he worked on his laptop for an hour or two before going back to sleep. Given the very public, very exposed situation at his reserved seat, he could not work on anything too sensitive like the strategic plans for Wise Apothecary & Chemists or his European shell corporations. He could however finish dealing with the little stinking cur that spoofed him and hampered his hack on WPP and Lawrence's plans for the ill-fated demise of his – poor – son (Eh eh eh, ironic that...).

Hobbling slowly on the way, the adolescent made his pit stop at the restroom then went to the common salon room where he was not impressed by the type of service offered. He had expected it and seen the photos on the company website but it was not even comparable to the Amtrak 5-star
experience. The food was prepared and served at a kiosk similar to the food court of a shopping mall or school cafeteria, meaning there was a glass counter with hot and cold sections holding the basic elements to make either sandwiches, salads or become side dishes for the daily special. The à-la-carte selection was very limited with only about 20 options that were not based on the pre-made fillings. The drinks choices were similarly limited, mostly a few coffees, teas and hot chocolate from an automated brewer along a chiller containing individual cans of fruit juice or soft drinks. You took a tray and ordered with the clerk who assembled your choice and took payment then you walked to one of the salon's tables or went back to your assigned seat in your wagon if your meal was easy to move and eat without a tabletop to hold items in place.

Lucas was well inured to the realities of working and eating simultaneously since the last fourteen years of his life had been lived under somewhat of a time-crunch given just how hard-packed his study-work-living schedule had been. Then again, he had achieved to receive multiple bachelors, masteries and doctorates during his short hard life so it had been time well managed after all. Speaking in his normal soft firm tones with the clerk, he asked for a morning club sandwich with spicy potatoes and caesar salad, two oat & raisin muffins, a large bowl of fruit salad and extra-large cappuccino, all packed in cartons and plastic for take-away.

After a short wait of not even fifteen minutes, Lucas had his warm meal packed in a plastic bag so he could bring it back to his carriage. A few minutes more and he was sitting in his plush seat with his laptop on the table near him to start filtering his messages and watch his preferred news sites while he ate his ordinary but nourishing meal. The basic egg, bacon & cheese sandwich hit the spot real well, with the spicy potatoes giving his mouth just enough savoriness to keep him awake and active until the next bout of sleepiness arrived in about an hour. The small caesar salad added some creamy greenery to his sandwich that was a bit on the bare side of things. That was the downside of coffee kiosk meals; they were usually bare-bones and the costs of extras would end up more expensive than a full meal in a regular deli or other full-service sit-down establishment.

After a short half-hour devoted to chewing through his sandwich, salad and some coffee, the teen stacked the used cartons on the end of the table and set aside towards the window the muffins and fruit salad as a snack for later. Now switching gears from watching the news for recreation over to his expert analytics and hacking apps, he got serious about business. Once all the surveillance and reprogramming tools were active, Lucas moved the suspect video file into a custom-built 'secured' media player that he had conceived. The application allowed to play safely virulated films or those files that were malware or spyware packaged and formatted to appear as regular videos to sneak past the normal detection and quarantine systems most companies used.

Taking out another small wire from his aluminum briefcase, the teen connected it to the front of the portable workstation then unspooled it, revealing a small rectangular controller and, further down the wire, a pair of small plastic earbuds that fit deeply inside the ear canals. Turning the laptop towards the window at 25 degrees to avoid somebody in the aisle seeing what he suspected would be a very graphic and threatening movie, he also cut all external sounds and dimmed the image luminosity by 25% to avoid garnering attention at this early hour of the day. Practically every other passenger was still deeply asleep, no need to wake them. The waiter had already removed his empty cartons and offered a coffee refill from the fresh brewed silex pots he had been carrying towards the service area at the front of the carriage at the time.

Now ensconced back under his trenchcoat and fully warm again, especially his legs, Lucas swallowed an extra strong Advil gelule for arthritis pains with some lukewarm cappuccino to ward off possible cramps. Once fully comfortable and prepared, he clicked the app to start the movie and analyze its invisible contents while the image played out.

The small recording only lasted about 78 seconds before it faded over to a black screen with bold
green text spelling out a website address (URL) in the Dark Web where the victim of the scam was to access a phantom 'client page' to make a coin payment of 100$ USD every week or else be subjected to the 'negative consequences' that were promised in the menial, low quality video.

Lucas was gripping the armrests of his seat hard enough that he was developing painful cramps in his fingers and palms from the strain. This little jerkwad should have been cleaned off the floor of the cheap motel where he was inconveniently dropped on before he managed to develop mobility and language skills. Abstinence, birth control and abortion were really undervalued as methods to ensure the quality of the human gene pool; someone should put out public health advisory notices about it. Now it would be Lucas that did the housekeeping chore of wiping him off the face of reality since nobody was conscientious enough to do it before now.

It needs to be known that Lucas had always reviled and despised rape and all sexual crimes from early in his childhood; especially against victims that clearly can't defend themselves like children, the very elderly or those cripples suffering reduced autonomy. As such, the teenager had always supported the use of deathly means (capital execution) to resolve permanently the cases of such criminals instead of wasting millions to keep them alive uselessly in prison. This was even more important when considering the especially high rates of recidivism upon release or the risks of violently escaping jail to keep on going through a life of crime. Therefore, the sick twisted little spoofer's scheme to wave around fake accusations of pedophilia and child exploitation made Lucas especially sick to his stomach and viscerally angry at the back-alley strutting slut of a cur.

The short video was straightforward in its conception and amateurish execution. It opened on a black painted badly lit room, very small and tightly packed, with only the table holding the CPU and the ordinary student's swivel chair visible in the image frame. Then, from off-camera to the side, came the bitchy little error of Nature. A young child, around 12 years old at most, pale white skin, pale blue eyes and dirty blond hair cut preppie-style short all over except for an idiotically long cowlick of dense stringy strands that hung down to his chin on the left side of his face, covering almost the entire side up to his nose.

At the beginning of the film, the kid was dressed in very tight, slutty-style shredded black jeans and a closed button-up flannel shirt in a generic tone of dark blue. As the film ran, the kid quickly unbuttoned his flannel shirt and dropped it to the chair in what was a poor imitation of a peepshow dancer's supposedly sensual movements, revealing underneath a worn drab gray T-shirt with slashes that had seen better days. Then the kid unzipped his torn jeans and dropped them to his knees but didn't actually take them off, revealing tight lycra boxer-briefs in lurid tones of highlighter yellow with traffic-light green details and seam stitching around the 'stuffed' pouch in the front. Lucas had done enough studies of medicine and anatomical development (he was a full DP & MD) that he knew damn well that a child this age would NEVER have genital organs big enough to fill those skinny shorts like THAT! For pity's sake, the kid's balls hadn't dropped out yet, as evidenced by his prepubescent voice, but he was gyrating and thrusting forward his pelvis with OBVIOUSLY packed shorts in an effort to attract attention to the crotch area. The boy spoke few words, almost all at the end in the last 30 seconds before the film faded to the black coordinates poster.

As he was gyrating his hips and pelvis-thrusting next to the chair, the whorish child grabbed a full handed hold on his 'stuffed' crotch and giggled himself at the camera while throwing back and leftwards his head in a spastic-thrice movement that looked like either a nervous tick or a snobbish affected mannerism to move that imbecilic curtain of hair out of his left eye. "Hundred dollars!" the boy's reedy, unbroken, whiny voice sounded out. "I wan'na hundred dollars every week from now on! And you better pay it, man! Cuz I know if you don't!" The boy giggled himself again as he threatened. "I know you looked! I know you wanted it! Well man, that's pervert stuff! It's gonna cost you, faggot! Hundred buck a week till I say so!" The kid then pulled up his jeans roughly and bragged like a stupid little ho'e stain in da hood at his would-be victim. "Cops'll wan'na know aall
about yo! They will! So you won't talk about me! You won't tell your bosses that the network's mine! You don't want the coppers to know what you've been doing with me online! You be paying, won't you! Hundred dollars a week! Every Friday!" The child finished his threat by grabbing again at his crotch over his zipped jeans and closed off "Yo mine, biaatch! Yo mine cuz I own yo ass! REMEMBER that I know you and where you work! You know what the pigs in jail do to perverts that hurt poor innocent little kiddies like me, don't you, pervert? So pay or the cops and jail!" Then the film ended to the URL and date for the first payment to pass.

In the background, where only the true pros could see, the film was running a spyware that tried repeatedly to determine the hardware & software portrait of the machine it was in and grab any user profile data it could to shunt through the unseen phantom Internex channel it was trying to establish to report a new victim to its creator. That was how the child would know that he had a 'fish' on the line to 'reel in' or else risk being discovered and stopped. Not to mention his list of victims could then be taken from him and used by others without giving him any profits or kickbacks at all.

While there were no doubts a few true pedophiles grabbed in his trap, Lucas thought it would be accidental. The emplacement of the trap told the teenager who was both an expert cyberneticist and certified psychiatric neurologist that the child was looking to entrap wealthy, high-status men, not just pedophiles and child exploiters. No, he was targeting specifically an area roamed by rich men who would prefer to pay a hundred bucks a week out of their brandy & cigar money than let out in public their little sideline of using illicitly the back-channels of the network to do – things – their bosses and families should be kept away from.

Still, the child was using the threat of publicly accusing these men of one of the most depraved crimes in human society just to mooch off some paltry pittances regardless of how ruinous those accusations would be, even if the men were eventually proven innocent in court. The way society was run nowadays, there were circles of armed vigilantes trawling the web, using free social media platforms to establish communities that 'watched and policed' their geographic locality's 'human trash' outside the bounds of law or normal police. Several beating resulting in disfigurement, handicapping and deaths occurred every year since about 2000 when a series of rapists were released after serving ultra-short sentences in complete isolation that were termed by the public and community activists as "time out in a kiddie camp". Popular anger coupled with loose municipal surveillance in a country that has 400,000,000 guns in circulations was not a recipe for peaceful civilian life, even in the rural areas.

Lucas was seeing red at the thought of this useless, gormless little parasite running this sort of scam for just a grubby few dollars a week, no doubt to pay himself candy, junk snacks, McDonald's by the ton and cheap booze, cigarettes and joints by paying an older teen to get it for him. The psychological profile of this type of behavior was neither complex nor unknown; it was hardly the first time that a smarmy little fucktard of this type was caught and debriefed by the cops or the broadcasting watchdogs. Making a decision based on that raw seething anger, Lucas decided to not bother identifying the little miscreant, even though he had everything needed to scour the social media platforms to find his face, then his home and family. At this point in life, it was absolutely useless to bother any further with the debased low-born sub-being.

Sneering in visceral contempt at the memory of the menial error of genetics in the film, the adolescent rapidly decrypted the very basic spyware running in the background and deftly hijacked the cheap, off-the-torrents code that was about the same age and capacity as the trap-app had been. Snort! Maybe the twit had gotten a package deal? "Buy trap, get monitoring virus included! 29,99$; all sales final, no refund, coin by transfer only." the teen whispered to himself in nasty sarcasm as he worked the keyboard of his portable workstation until he had the desired result accomplished.

Smiling in satisfaction, Lucas recompiled the code of the heavily edited spyware then pulled the file
from the quarantine dumpster and set it in his ports/channels/connections & traffic management application. A few more clicks had the 'pirated' illegal program connected and happily sending to its unknowing childish master the coordinates of a new rich old man to con out of a few dollars. Let's see what the bratty cock-shaker would do about this one!

The new victim's user profile data report would lead the whiny little spoofer from WPP's server backdoor and all the way to the doorstep of the OTHER childish blond moppet of everyone's nightmares for the last four years. But maybe not four more if this long-shot gambit panned out...

Lucas smiled a nasty wide smirk at the thought of the juvenile nitwit trying to extort Donald J Trump through the not very well known Air Force 1 presidential servers of Internex, telephony and military comms as if it were just another anonymous desktop CPU in a company office of some easy-to-con middle-aged pothead.

"Ah, good times for all!" the young genius preened sarcastically with a shit-eating grin. That would teach the debased little bastard to entrap people with such a dirty, destructive accusation. After his own painful and shameful experience two years ago, Lucas was not in any mood to be merciful or forgiving towards the dastardly little parasite. He was exploiting a very grave, hard to live problem and making life exponentially harder for all those that did live it and tried to bring forth complaints against the attackers, just to get rebuffed by an uncaring, disinterested society.

Not anymore.

The damned little defective retard would learn not to make such accusations lightly, and he would no longer waste the time and efforts of others with his inept, ineffectual, attempts at damaging the cybernetic fiefdom of other, more capable users. Whatever punishments befell him when the Secret Services investigated him was his own fault and his own merit. If you live by crime, you have to expect and accept the violence, backstabbing, betrayals and double-crossing of that life.

Now that his last real 'not-Lawrence generated' problem was finished, the teenager yawned widely and scratched at a few itches around his right knee joint. Emitting a long sigh, he whelmed some courage and set to closing, folding shut and packing away securely all of his gear and personal effects back in his briefcase before ensconcing himself deeply in the reclined seat for another long period of sleep. Hopefully, he would be able to unconsciously ignore the waking passengers' activities and slumber through the morning until the scheduled arrival in Vancouver passed lunch time.

Cold greetings from our hosts

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 13:11pm

Pacific Central Station; Via Rail train, parked

Vancouver City, BC, Canada

The sounds of the train were annoying him to no ends as he roused from the darkness of sleep. Scrunching his face in disapproval, the teenager shook his head to move his Fedora upwards away from his eyes so he could see around without leaving the cozy warm mound created by his trenchcoat. Following his predictions, he had experienced a very simple, restful morning spent in sleep sitting in the thickly padded coach seat after cleaning out his network access problems. He had slept until just now, when the disembarking bell had sounded quite rudely. Looking at the sunlight streaming in the windows, the noisy people chatting and bustling around without a care in the world
other than dressing up and finding their carry-ons, the boy grumbled quite unamicably as he tried to untangle from his coat to stand up and begin the process of disembarking.

A quick check at his mechanical wristwatch confirmed that the long, heavy vehicle had indeed done good time all along the night and morning, arriving only some six minutes passed the hour on the schedule. Now, all Lucas had to do was get off, find his trunk and lug it all the way to an appropriate car service to reach his chosen hotel at long last.

As the youth started the painful three-legged trudge towards the exit point and the baggage car, he mumbled to himself about the crushing crowd and feel of claustrophobia that was threatening him. Hopefully, getting his trunk would not be too long so he could leave quickly. As luck would have it, he was able to find and obtain his trunk in less than a quarter hour. Finding the parking lot and taxi stand was easy but he needed a more spacious vehicle after getting stuck in a cramped coach seat for almost 12 hours.

His legs had badly healed from his last physical encounter with Lawrence two years ago since he had gotten only partial treatments. As long as he wasn't at least 20 years old, his body would not be done maturing so any truly permanent treatments would just have to be redone every year and spending 2 weeks in hospital with a month of physiotherapy afterwards over the next four years did not appeal to him. His damaged legs were functional but not fully repaired, just patched up enough to be autonomous and walk around; so now they were giving him angry signals that they would not support him for long.

Setting himself aside from the foot traffic by sitting on a wooden bench in the middle of the concourse, he rifled through his carry-on for the bottle of Advil gelules and the metallic thermal bottle of mineral water he always carried for such recurring situations. After taking his pill, he opened a small leather pack similar to his toiletry kit to pull out two dermal osmosis patches laced with topical clinical strength analgesic ointment. He quickly and aptly lifted his pants' sleeves and applied the patches on the lower part of the legs then covering them with the socks to keep them protected.

After medicating himself, the adolescent unlocked his heavy wheeled trunk, searching for his custom-built armament cane that would support his weight and make him feel secure much better. The cheap ordinary cane he had been using got stored into the trunk as a back-up in case he lost the main tool. With a deep sigh of sadness as he thought of his dreary lonely birthday coming in 7 days, Lucas took out the solid steel device and elongated it to its full height, then tested the solidity of the assembly. The weapon was the product of his imagination and milled in his Stanford workshop's CNC by his own hands. It had seen violent use many times already in just the six months he had used it.

{ SQ } - { Hatchet Cane } - { SQ }

The armament cane Lucas normally walked around with when he felt unsteady from reactions to his meds or cramps in the legs was built out of four pieces of solid milled steel. It had a pistol-grip/hatchet for a handle, with a main barrel, then a secondary telescopic shank to adjust height up to 45" tall and finally the manual folding survival blade.

The pommel was based on the classic cane 'pistol-grip' model but with two modifications; the short knob in front had been elongated and enlarged to become a hammer head with a 2 inch circular flat face whilst the longer horizontal part of the grip was flattened, elongated and arced until it formed a ribbon-style blade for a thin woodsman's hatchet that ended with a lower pointed 'beard' to act as a tree hook. The pommel was usually completely covered by a thick transparent vinyl sleeve to avoid accidents with the sharp ax blade and allow Lucas to hold the cane bare handed without slipping
from a sweaty, shaking hand when he got really sick from his treatments or medications.

The main barrel was a tempered steel pipe 24” long that had the pommel screwed solidly on top and the secondary shank slid inside the lower aperture in a piston-type action. The telescopic movement was locked simply by a pair of standard manual spring-pin locks placed on opposing sides of the shank. The holes for the pins were only in the last 12 inches of the main barrel, just like normal canes for the sick and elderly.

The secondary shank was made of a solid tempered steel rod 24” long (4” stay inside upper barrel) with a two-sided spring-pin mechanism at the top and the slot for the blade at the bottom. At the lower end were the blade pivot, the slitted 1” tall rubber foot that protects the cane from wear and the sliding screw-ring that served to lock the blade in its closed/open position.

The survival blade had 12” usable length ( plus 2” tang/pivot), 1½” wide by ¼” thick tempered steel slat with a symmetrical profile. It was completely flat, sharpened smooth on one edge and serrated as a saw on the reverse with a triangular point for stabbing through thick clothing if need be. It was set in an inert – unassisted – pivot; you had to unscrew the safety ring and slide it up to let the blade fall open then push the ring down all the way to screw it around the pivot joint to keep the blade in workable position. Since the blade created a hunting spear when open, it could be seen as 'dangerous' however, since it just dangled uselessly if not ring-locked as it didn't 'click' like a traditional hunter's flicker knife would, it could pass police test as 'too weak and too slow for angry reflex attacks'.

With the hatchet-cane was a folded Canadian government form, albeit a dubious one, given to Lucas by a pair of the train station's customs inspectors when he boarded the train in Seattle, following a short interview conducted aboard the coach car as result of the check-in baggage inspection. It was a 'TEMPORARY {non-firearm} weapon ownership & carrying permit' for 30 days only. The Canadian Federal Police (RCMP) would get a digital copy and check in on him promptly within the next 5 days, maybe less in fact. The form spelled out that his cane was 'clearly a combat weapon' that Lucas 'clearly intended' it for usage in 'prepared self-defense' in case he was 'out of reach' of police protection.

Peace, Order and Good Government; those were the fundamental values in Canada, in that order.

True to the culture and legal practices of the very peaceful northern country, it wasn't the type, style or size of the weapon that determined why they allowed Lucas - a foreign, minor child - to carry it through the border in his trunk instead of confiscating it on the spot as would usually happen. Some people even got arrested routinely at the border crossing if they insisted or tried to lie about weapons in their luggage, some as small as Swiss army knives or crafts blades. Lucas had wisely preempted trouble by giving the rail line company and customs officers a notarized written declaration about his cane and why he had it to explain it wasn't contraband or criminally intended.

You could THEORETICALLY walk around Canada with a knife, machete or ax as long as:

- It was carried openly, not hidden; back-packs and trunks were iffy legally
- If inside a carrier; you actively declare it before they find it or 'else'
- It was carried safely, as in 'not easy to steal from you'
- It was not meant to intimidate but only as a tool of survival / work implement
It was not carried with the desire to cause harm or to 'trouble public peace'

Amusingly, by Canada's written laws, Lucas' cane blade didn't count as 'concealed' as it was carried in plain view and the vinyl cover on the main handle was transparent thus removing many hurdles and accusations of preparing a crime. Besides, the cane was an overly big, cumbersome, slow to maneuver into action crutch; not something somebody could pull from a pocket or sleeve in a fit of rage and fast-attack with like a jackknife or box cutter so it was seen as 'a bit' less dangerous. Go figure...

And YES; Canadian criminal code laws in general make a far greater case of the 'intended / actual usage' of any item rather than its design/nature since they had planned and written their laws to avoid the querulous nit-pickers who would say "It's not in the list of prohibited items, so it's legal to use" even if they held the bloodied item in hand when the cops came in. Because of such cases going through the courts, the laws were crafted with a voluntary level of vagueness and flexibility favorable towards the police and prosecutors; this of course puts a burden of proof on the accused instead.

Canada does have several types of non-gun weapons fully banned though and no excuse would get you out of trouble. Any spring-loaded jackknife, balisong (butterfly) blades; ANY blade hidden inside an innocuous object like the infamous 'comb-knife' where the teeth serve as sheath for the blade and ALL versions of the punch-blade (fist knife) called 'constant companion'. ALL brass knuckles, pin-rings, spiked wristbands - and implicitly - ANYTHING not listed but related to ambushing a victim or doing a subterfuge attack with the goal of knocking out the person to facilitate kidnapping. Shuriken in all forms are illegal and so are most weapons that damage primarily by being thrown. Many non-edged weapons like the nunchaku, flail / morning star and spring loaded telescopic baton are reputed illegal unless they are used in a gym, martial arts competition or historical recreation scene.

Firearms laws covered ALL guns including flare guns, starter pistols, and ALL electrical weapons like Taser pistols are treated as "Prohibited Firearm" and sooo illegal for civilians... Air-pressure mechanical systems (paintball gun) and traditional mouth-held blowguns were treated under firearms laws if taken to court for charges, just like all bows and crossbows.

Basically, the laws were written that it's the police that decide if it's a 'tool' or if it's 'forbidden' at the moment of encounter according to your personal circumstances at the time. Therefore, anything you hold in your possession can be declared a 'prohibited weapon' and be subjected to charges of 'criminal usage of item' according to whatever perceptions, leanings or deficits of training the police officers doing the investigation bring to the situation. This of course means that the usual problems of education, politeness, manners, and calm demeanor (or lack of them) from all involved will greatly influence the outcome of the decision.

Lucas being naturally mild-mannered, a jewish boy who looked 'very white', from a good, rich family with a superbly high education, in medicine no less, and his own many companies with several offices and hundreds of workers meant that he would normally get better reactions from police than let's say... A socially isolated teen boy with black skin from a poor family who dropped out of secondary school and had no job or home at the moment.

Situation-based negotiable legality is a damned bitch...

This peril-frought encounter could then escalate into the domain of arrest, charges and going to the ministry of Justice, thus going into the dreaded 'SYSTEM'. This put you in the hands of the limited perceptions & philosophical leanings of the crown attorneys who will be more or less invested in making the charges 'stick' in court. Their efforts will be decided depending on the directives given by the elected government in post. Conservatives like imprisoning teenagers and sending them to 'boot
camp' prisons while Liberals prefer to hand out fines to fill up the state coffers.

In an elected government, "JUSTICE" and "LEGAL," don't always mean the same thing for everyone.

At which point, the application of the weapons laws will be subjected to the leanings of the magistrate in charge of the case but in a very discrete manner since ‘politicking’ from the bench is much frowned upon in Canadian legal tradition. Blatant exploitation of the bench for personal gain or vengeance by European judges in the middle ages and Renaissance had caused massive suffering for the citizens and several revolts; something the people of Canada remembered. In consequence, they established laws specially targeted at forbidding activism or proselytism from the bench. Remember: the judges in Canada are not elected, they are nominated by the ministers of Justice; therefore any type of overt act that goes against the "principle of judicial self-restraint", like expressions of political, religious, sexist or ageist bigotries are immediate cause for appeal that could lower the sentence or even completely undo the case due to unprofessional misconduct.

Take note; PROVING that either the cops, prosecutors or seated judge have been any less than professional is a backbreaking chore with low chances of success. Misconduct amongst the judicial in Canada does exist, like everywhere, but it is 'relatively' rare because the proceedings are usually open to the public. The trials are recorded for public archives and ALL legal cases become accessible to the law faculties of the universities the moment they are closed. Hiding bad decisions or influence from personal bias is HARD for judges and social action groups are actively sifting through each and every search & seizure, investigation, prosecution and sentence handed down for hints of bad policing, abusive prosecution or overly severe judging.

{ SQ } - { Musings on bigots } - { SQ }

Lucas shook his head despondently, reorienting his thoughts elsewhere than which laws applied and whether his permit would be finalized to his needs. What really had him steamed at the moment was something different altogether. The private contractors used as customs agents by the Seattle train station had not exactly let Lucas pass into the train with the steel cane in his trunk out of the kindness of their hearts. They had thought he had valid reasons to carry it, given that Lucas had happily (not really; no...) given them copies of his medical files, all notarized by the detectives, prosecutors, DCFS and insurance adjuster working his attempted rape case and the beating given by Lawrence. He had gone the extra mile and given them his refugee status claim forms along the dual-citizenship request and the investor immigrant application forms, all original reproductions from his lawyer's office.

Between the multiple judicial documents and verifying his long eventful history with the Silicon Valley police department and DCFS, the train line's customs agents concluded "the kid would be more helpful to polite, honest society" with the ax-cane in hand rather than without. What really got the boy's heart to stop cold was the flippan comments he heard the rent-a-cops say about him as they left the car about him being "a heroic fighter against bitch-ho'e droppings".

The bastards were closeted white nationalists who thought he would repeat his 'exploits' if left alone.

It was just their bad luck that the teenager had the nasty habit since coming to Stanford of keeping a button-camera in his shirt collar, connected by a hidden wire to a specialized burn-phone in a sewn pocket at the rear of the shirt. Lucas had physically changed the chipset for a custom one that only sends out, doesn't receive, to five separate private 'ghost' servers. Anything said in 10 feet around his person was recorded and if you were in font of him, you got filmed in color; it was all sent to data farms out of country to be used later. It had helped the young man at several occasions where people had tried to pass service contracts and then reneged on paying him his dues. In other cases, it had
helped him claim self-defense against juvenile thugs around Stanford Town in the years he had lived there. A small child with a laptop was a target for thieves and vandals; hitting back when he was attacked could be hazardous if there were no witnesses, so filming was the alternative.

Those bigoted guards would not enjoy the report he was going to file against them.

And Lucas did not at all appreciate being called a hero, like some sort of crusading follower of the KKK strolling around the streets looking for people to harm. He had the misfortune in the past year to use that cane 5 times to save someone's life, but always at the cost of other lives. It just happened by the worst of all bad luck that the attackers had been black, latino or Indian-Sikh. Not a single white perpetrator and, according to the off-handed remarks of the bigoted, white male, anglo-saxon cops; that was "just how Nature worked with these people."

Now you knew WHY the teen's sleep-time was not getting any better

Hence why he, a mere fifteen year old boy, had hired a shrink of his own free will.

Near 13:40pm, the boy was finally rested enough to function, and sufficiently armed, to endure a long walk on rough snowy ground if he had to go outside the station. Lucas gripped the cane pommel with both hands to hoist himself up, feeling stronger and more stable just by the comforting presence of hard steel in his cold shaking hand. The oral ibuprofen and epidermal cortisone certainly helped with that state of affairs too. He took up again his slow walk around the train station's outer perimeter until he saw three different car rental company kiosks clustered together, but none what he wanted. Shrugging, he simply asked one of the rental agents if the type of luxury car service he wanted was offered by someone other than the regular taxis out in the parking lot. Getting a bigger car with better leg room and more helpful driver to reach the hotel was a must now that both his legs were reacting badly to the colder climate and he was having the preliminary tremors that indicated bad muscle cramps to come shortly if he didn't warm up fast despite the patches he had applied.

His good fortune held as he was guided to a larger kiosk towards the station's VIP passengers' lounge, something that, in hindsight, he should have guessed. It only took ten minutes before he was seated comfortably on a plush chair in front of the limousine rental agency, massaging his legs as he was booking his one-way trip to the hotel. The young man in his thirties that was the kiosk clerk didn't even bat an eye at seeing the corporate credit card or the age of the company owner. With Lucas' passport, Blue Cross insurance number and driver's license as backup ID, the reservation went smoothly. The teen could even just walk outside to the car as the agency had three in stand-by in the lot at all times that the US train came in. The Via arrival from Seattle always occasioned a bump in requests for luxury conveyance around town, especially during the holidays, so the agency never took any chances to be without a car at hand the moment the client asked. Since Lucas didn't need a specific model or something fancy, just leg room and warmth for the trip, he was in for fast service.

The kiosk agent had him wait inside the station besides the rental desk where it was warm so the driver could come pick him up and drag the heavy luggage for him. It would also avoid mistakes of identity or lack of manners from the driver if he was presented the client at the desk. Not that the clerk would ever say that out loud, but better be safe than sorry. Since Lucas was well seated and his legs were in fact starting to warm up a bit, the adolescent decided that waiting inside wasn't a bad idea. There is of course no way that the complimentary cappuccino offered by the clerk had anything to do with his decision-making process. It was the two vanilla biscotti served with the coffee that did that.

The driver came in, dressed in the classic black 3-piece suit with black cap and white gloves, covered
by a deep gray trenchcoat. The kiosk agent introduced the teenager as the client to drive around as well as the destination. The chauffeur knew about the Daleminton hotel complex across the water over the Lions Gate Bridge in Park Royal District in the north-western sector of the town. It was in a patch of wild greenery just on the upper side of Marine Drive, right after crossing the Capilano River. In fact, it sat at the beginning of the "Capilano Pacific Trail" for amateur hikers and mountain bikers right on the shores of the river. The chauffeur had driven people over there many times since he worked for the company. It was a well known, well appreciated hotel that had many repeat clients. It had a well deserved reputation for high-class service and amenities that wouldn't let down the young client. Unfortunately, it would be almost 90 minutes to reach in normal times; now in winter with the holiday rush traffic in full swing, it could take up to 2 hours or worse if there was a traffic jam on a major road or spontaneous snowstorm.

Considering this, Lucas asked the driver if he knew a good restaurant in the area between the station and hotel so he could stop to eat and walk around a bit to exercise his aching legs. He hadn't eaten anything since around 06:00am other than the courtesy coffee he had just finished off so he needed a solid meal quickly enough to avoid getting a migraine. Moving a bit should keep the cramps from manifesting fully; at least that's what his physiotherapist used to tell him. The driver and rental agent gave a few suggestions of diverse culinary styles that had the boy thinking about what he felt like eating. Giving in to his desire for some sightseeing, he asked to be driven an hour away to a large skyscraper called the Harbour Center on West Hastings Street near the Gastown District that held a shopping mall with the usual food court and boutiques. It's most iconic landmark however was the revolving restaurant on it's top floor that offered superb panoramic views of the town as it pivoted.

Now safely across the borderlines, Lucas thought he could allow himself to buy a few personal items and extra clothing since he would not have to lug it around that long. Also, his hotel was less than 25 minutes by car from the Royal Park shopping mall plus all the smaller boutiques of the Northern zones of Vancouver Harbour. Crossing waterways, inlets, creeks and small lakes would be a nice change from the arid, semi-desertic climate of Silicon Valley. Satisfied with the services offered to date, the teen confirmed his acceptance of the terms and signed the final form to establish a client account with the company for repeat service during his stay in town. Since he would be getting many medical treatments soon, he would not be able to drive, even when his birthday passed, so having the corporate account set up already would earn him better service and priority over walk-in newbies if they lacked enough cars to serve everyone in his area.

As they walked to the parking lot, the driver explained to Lucas that along with driving the car and giving touristic infos, he also served as porter for the baggage and escort to make certain merchants would not dismiss him due to his age. He was not however a bodyguard; he would call the police if trouble was encountered. Lucas approved wholeheartedly as he declared himself "Allergic to trouble", despite his long, painful history that he never spoke about unless it was necessary.

The car itself was bland looking which the adolescent didn't really care about as he had never been a car geek. As long as it rolled and carried him safely to destination, he couldn't really care. The 2010 black Cadillac short limousine for six passengers was just big enough to grant luxurious leg room without calling undue attention to himself in the streets as they drove around Vancouver. Lucas kept the partition shutter opened as he wasn't on the phone or asleep and he needed to speak with another 'safe' human being after so much isolation in the last few years. For someone as sociable as him, Stanford's juvenile thugs, thieves and vandals had insured that his university years had not been such a happy time in his life.

The first leg of the trip was as slow as anticipated. Going from the Pacific Station to the restaurant meant traversing the Downtown District of the city in Thursday afternoon rush traffic just eight days from the biggest holidays of the year. They were "lucky to not stall in the line", so the driver said with a shrug and easy smile as he spoke of the usual patterns of the city. His client didn't mind,
seeming to drink in every word while memorizing the information for later travels inside the bustling town.

The chauffeur left the train station on a northern direction by Station Street, then went left to join Main Street northwards until he could turn west at Hastings Street, the road that the desired shopping mall was located on. It was a very long boulevard that crossed several districts and it was packed with enough traffic and pedestrians all along the length of it in a manner that reminded Lucas of the busiest streets of San Francisco or Silicon Valley, except it was covered in white stuff from winter's gifts. Lucas truly enjoyed the view of the Yuletide decorations all around as they drove along the populous commercial boulevard until they reached the massive skyscraper & shopping mall located just passed the limit of the Gastown District.

The driver circled the edifice until he could find a lucky spot as another car was leaving; he didn't want to go into an underground garage since his passenger had specified he wanted to sight-see a bit before reaching his hotel. Once out of the car, the older man showed his client the outer windows of the restaurant he had chosen, all the way at the top of the building. The teenager was only partially impressed by the edifice: one steel and glass tower was pretty much the same, no matter where you were in North America. The youth was much more interested in learning that the Canadian Passport Office was located on West Hastings Street just a few blocks up from the building which was important as he would have a lot to do over there in the coming weeks.

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 15:21pm

Vancouver city; Harbour Center Tower & mall

A short ten minute walk from the car had the pair inside the shopping section of the 28 storey tower, strolling around leisurely in search of a restaurant less famous than the one on top since it happened that you needed reservations to have a seat. Calling just on the cusp of Thursday dinner rush was not going to get them a table and food was now a critical necessity for the teen. He had eaten the two small muffins and tepid fruit salad from the train's salon kiosk at around 10:30am when he woke up for a short trip to the toilet. That was now very far behind him and he could feel that even the limousine rental agent's coffee and cookies would not let him hold out until supper. Thankfully, shopping centers like these always have three or four full-service establishments besides the coffee shops and food court kiosks.

Lucas and his driver spoke in quiet tones as they walked to the public entrance, navigating the Christmas rush crowds that were annoying due to the teen's limited mobility. The security guard at the entrance of the mall was looking over the people as they walked by, his eyes scanning the pedestrian flow in quick superficial moves. He looked towards Lucas, seeing his high-class clothes and the cane he leaned on to walk then saw the escorting uniformed driver so he promptly switched targets to follow instead the progress of a group of boisterous high school students carrying many large deep shopping bags in which items could 'accidentally' drop from shelves. The driver saw the guard's movements but said nothing; there had been no interactions with his client so no harm to decry.

A quick look over a conveniently placed mall map right at the public entrance gave them their quarry inside of 60 seconds. It was located on the second mezzanine overlooking the cavernous empty interior of the mall, giving an incredibly clear view of the milling crowds. A slow paced march with rides up two mechanical escalators had them almost in reach of their goal as it was practically right next to the landing of the moving staircase.

The majordomo at the restaurant doorway gave a single look at the teen's clothes and uniformed
driver before he promptly put in place his usual polite smile for good clients. The young male looked sick and tired with a paleness to his features that didn't give an indication he'd be causing trouble unlike a lot of spoiled brats that ate in the restaurant with their rich parents. He also seemed to carry himself with a sober, quiet sort of dignity that made the elderly majordomo take notice of his attitude that was much more polite than was normal for the age group. Thus positively impressed, he had the usher quickly at hand so the pair was escorted to the requested booth in the windows facing towards the mall's vast, multi-level concourse. The waiter was already present with a tray carrying menus, water pitcher and glasses before they had even taken off their trench coats.

The 4-star service was quick and efficient, despite the abnormal crowds. Christmas season was clearly in full swing by now, or gift shopping for the family parties was, at any rate. Lucas was well aware through his research on the society and politics of his new country of residence that they were far less religious than the average US city and also far less likely to make a public mess about it. That gave him hope that he could live at peace without some God-nut always trying to steal his company or convert him by force in order to 'save his lost soul'. He wasn't lost you twits; he was migrating to a new country and had pretty much found where he wanted to be at, thank you so very much.

The restaurant's menu had a mix of European classics with some Canadian specialties done in a Haute Cuisine style to merit the establishment's rating. Even the Host's Table wasn't cheap since they were essentially in the beating heart of Vancouver's Downtown core and the middle of the financial sector of the city. Everything in the shops they had seen was mostly mid-class to luxury-class items or services with proportional pricing. Given some of the people he did business with since he was 9 years old through his many trust funds and companies as well as the places he had dined with his customers in Silicon Valley or Stanford, Lucas was not overly excited about the costs.

As was the basic normality for his situation as client, Lucas told the waiter to put both meals on a single receipt in the name of Wolenbahn Electronics, his corporation, and he would deduce the lot as business travel expenses in his taxes. Having the driver wait outside or eat elsewhere on his own money would be height of ill-cultured uncouthness to such level that Lucas would actually call it an act of 'vulgar disrespect' towards the hired employee. If you were rich and lived richly, that didn't give you the right to spit on others or wave your standing at them then leave them in the rain whilst you basked in your privilege inside the restaurant or shop. Lucas refused to even consider acting like that because he would hate being treated like that himself and, more than anything else, he remembered how his parents had both acted towards the staff in their houses and offices. He would NEVER act that way with his contractors, ever!

The meal was pleasant but above all else filling. That really had been a necessity as the teen could feel the first tendrils of a migraine trying to wrap around his brain to crush him with pain. Thankfully, he had his bottles of Gravol and Advil in the small traveler's kit that attached around his waist under his jacket. As a precaution, he took one of each and swallowed them with a mouthful of the excellent fresh-squeezed fruit juice that he had taken with his main course. The pair savored slowly their desserts and coffees as the younger man wanted to rest his aching trembling legs more, getting as much warmth inside his chest and legs as he could before going on the road again. The adolescent had realized some 15 minutes after taking the pills that the train voyage from Seattle in coach class had drained him far more than he expected compared to the sleeper-class experience. Speaking with the driver, he decided to visit just two or three shops for immediate necessities in case the hotel hadn't furnished the suite's fridge and cupboards with it already, then leave by the most direct route north.

{ SQ } - { More bang for your buck } - { SQ }

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 18:01pm

Vancouver city; Harbour Center Tower & mall
In the shopping mall, Lucas stopped by a pharmacy for some extra over-the-counter meds to deal with his migraines or muscle cramps in his legs and lower back that tended to act up at night. After getting that plus a few paper magazines and newspapers specific to Vancouver, they walked around a bit until they reached the only store in the mall that advertised as being 'thrifty'. The Dollorama store chain covered Canada widely and offered quite a few good things, including known canadian brands and imported european items. Lucas decided to walk around the aisles curiously as he hadn't seen much of use for him despite the rows of clothing, hygiene products, kitchen utensils, and even tools of all sorts for household renovation or car repairs. The rows of candies, chips and munchies were funny but well placed next to the real food, most of it canned, pickled or vacuum sealed for microwaving. The teenager asked the driver to get him a wheeled basket so he could pick up a few things, just in case.

After picking up a few dry snacks, candy bags and chocolate bars, mostly costing 1$ or 2$ each unit, the boy took a few microwave-ready instant meals in-a-cup at 2$ each in case he had a pressing craving or needed to eat with a pill he had just taken to avoid having acid reflux. As they were leaving the food aisle, the pair passed by the 'seasonal' zone that had the Christmas ornaments and all winter related thingies. Lucas suddenly stopped hard, startling the chauffeur who almost rammed into his back as he was following behind his client, pushing the cart. The teen had seen something that grabbed his attention bad enough that he pulled out his smartphone to take pictures of the entire display section of shelves and items. Looking around, he saw one of the merchandisers filling the shelves and baskets a bit further who had stopped his work to curiously watch the boy's activities.

Approaching the worker, Lucas asked politely "Can you get me the store manager, please? I have some questions to ask about store policies for some items on sale. Thanks." The teen then walked back to stand besides his basket and driver, a frown visible on his pale, thoughtful face.

It only took five minutes for the female manager to come speak with him. She was a bit older, around fiftyish, with brown skin and black hair common to the Persian nations. With a kind smile, she asked what the store could do for him, specifying that they still had some items in the back-store from the autumn seasonals that hadn't been shipped back to central warehouse yet. The boy pointed to one set of items placed loosely in the shelves, not under locked glass panels as he had expected. "Excuse my ignorance, Madam, but I am new to the country and I'm trying to understand the laws about carrying sharp tools or weapons in public. I was told that things like that 5$ hatchet or that 3$ swiss-army type pocket knife were considered 'weapons' and shouldn't be sold openly or carried in public without a 'valid reason' in the eyes of the police. Why are they just lying there, in an open basket without locks or surveillance?" He asked completely out of sorts about the situation.

The woman's smile became wider as she chuckled at the young foreigner's questions. He was kind and polite with her, not arrogant or bullish like many tourists so she decided to take the time to answer him, especially in light of his driver and full basket behind him. A good client was a precious commodity and she didn't want him to go away with a bad impression of her chain's service. "What you see here sir, is ordinary across most of Canada, even in the city areas." she spoke in Canadian-English with a pronounced Farsi accent. "We always have tools for yard work or camping, pretty much all year long, and some basic stuff like these could be seasonal needs too. We have more variety of choice in the spring and summer." The manager thought for a second about her explanation before putting it to words. "It's for the tourists you see. They come for the trails and the parks, for back-packing and camping in the easy weather. Since there is a lot of that going on in winter too, and some people have wood stoves that need chopping wood for all year long, we keep basic tools like these all the time."

The teen was frowning again, deep in thought. From his own perspective and experience, this was
perfectly logical both for clients and for the store's marketing plan. It was the police and law enforcement side of things that had him thinking so hard while comparing his own cane and other defensive measures to what he saw. "Can you tell me then, why these 'tools' as you call them are not locked in a glass display case or just behind the counter? I was led to believe that anything 'pointed, sharp or threatening' would not be openly sold, especially to minor-aged people."

The woman openly laughed, shaking her head at his question. "Americans! You have a weird view of the world. It's true Canada's laws are much tighter than yours about guns and big combat knives but not that way. We can own and sell these things openly to anybody with money. There's no permit asked, just 5$ plus the sales taxes, so about 6,00$. And no, we are not obliged to deny purchase because of age, the laws don't oblige us that. When items cause questions like that, the people at the head office have lawyers look it over with the government before they even buy the stock. If there had been problems, it wouldn't be on the shelves that way."

Lucas blinked slowly both eyes in synch as he thought through the information, trusting in his button-camera to record everything as evidence when he would petition the RCMP for his concealed-carry permit for his cane and a few other things. "What about those knives, though?" asked the adolescent as he pointed to a 6" long fish filleting knife exposed on a hook inside a flimsy carton & plastic wrapper. Anybody could pry that open to steal it or worse, take it and pay 3$+tx at the cash register to walk away with it perfectly legally from what he was told. "How can you guarantee that it won't be purchased by a thug from a street gang or a kid that will intimidate other kids in a school yard?"

The woman shook her head in sympathy for the boy. She had finally given the thick heavy cane he leaned on a deeper look and saw the milled steel head under the transparent vinyl wrapper, it's hatchet blade and hammer face promising pain to any who attacked the child. And he WAS a child; she was a mother to three girls aged 14 to 9 so she could see just how young and frail he was under those pricey, bulky clothes. "You must come from a very violent neighborhood to think about things like that when you travel abroad. And to carry that with you... You were hurt badly, far ago, weren't you? You remind me of my brother Aslem and I, when we left Afghanistan forty years ago, during the Russian's war there. We saw things, we were hurt by people we thought were our own... But when war strikes, food and medicines are rare, people get desperate... They ignore neighbors, exploit family and even turn on their own."

Turning towards the innocuous display of flat shelves, racks and hooks, the mature woman made a wistful face at her memories, gazing into a far removed past she still tried to forget. "Canada is not perfect you will see." She spoke in whispered words. "But it will treat you kindly. The vast majority of its people will welcome you and help you. The hurts you suffered... The injuries that need still healing... Maybe even the things that lie in the dark at night, waiting for you to sleep so they can make you suffer in the dreams... You will find help here, in our cold forests of wood and steel." She finished in almost imperceptible tones, now morose at the conversation.

"I thank you for your time and kind words to me, good mother. May you and your home be blessed for this deed of kindness." Lucas answered in accented Farsi, one of the 20 plus tongues he spoke fluently.

The manager was surprised at the switch of language, smiling widely at him in thanks. With a nod she completed the information he had asked. "For what you say, kids will be kids and vandals will break things, no matter what you do. There are store that present the knives and axes in locked cases, yes, like the Canadian Tire, because their products are expensive or they fear lawsuits like in the US and Europe. People who have a hurt relative want justice, sometimes vengeance. They look for reason, for compensation for the pain or loss of life. So they find who sold the knife or gun and sue them. It's not logical because those things are not known when we sell them."
"So the law says we have to try and be reasonable. If we hear a pair of young teenaged boys having a bad argument in the concourse and then one comes in to get a hatchet or big knife like this or the butchering blades in the kitchen section, we would ask questions and maybe say no to him. It depends a lot. If a young kid of 11 or 10 years old comes in with some coins and a shopping list, it usually means his parents sent him for it, so we sell. The laws have... Flexibility, yes? That's the word. Flexibility and common sense in them. The rest is up to the police to figure out." She finished her speech, waiting for the boy to ask anything else.

With a shake of the head, Lucas signified he was done but picked up one exemplar of each item he thought litigious to place in his basket for purchase. They would serve as part of his physical proof when dealing with the police or the crown attorneys if it went that deep in the system. After completing the circuit around all the aisles, including a return to the kitchen utensils where he picked up some Betty Crocker branded butcher's knife for 3$ and a big heavy meat cleaver for 4$, the teen was done browsing the store and ready to walk out.

At the cash register, the manager was present, diligently counting a small stack of twenty dollar bills for the end-of-shift deposit. She smiled at the pair again and spoke to the cashier they were lined up for, making the young asian woman in her early twenties smile and laugh. The girl was pleasant with them and easily accepted to separate the basket's contents on two bills as the teen asked politely in Nihongo after seeing the small Japanese flag printed on her T-shirt. The manager behind the cashier looked up surprised at the boy speaking another complex language besides English and Farsi with such fluency that his accent was very slight. Without further holdups, the transactions were done quickly to the satisfaction of the young client. Lucas absolutely needed all the tools on one single ticket to keep for his records. That's also the reason he paid for the sharps with his debit card; he wanted an electronic trace to prove where he had bought the items. After that was done, they were able to walk out of the shopping mall and back to the car.

{ SQ } - { On the road of life } - { SQ }

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 18:58pm

Vancouver city; Harbour Center in the street

The road to the hotel was almost another hour ahead of them and it was passed time they got rolling if they wanted to get there at a reasonable time. As they reached the outside of the mall towards the parked car, the driver clicked the remote attached to his keychain to start the engine as he asked "Will you be going elsewhere or just the hotel, sir?"

"I will actually need to stay stationary for a short while. I have some things to search for on the web and then at least one phone call to make before I can schedule the rest of the day. If my call isn't what I want, then I might have to go back deeper into town for a couple of hours before going at the hotel for the night." the young passenger answered politely in his usual understated manner. Nodding, the chauffeur stayed silent until they reached the vehicle whence the man unlocked the car trunk to place the purchases for the rest of the trip while the boy took up his aluminum briefcase to bring inside the cabin with him.

Once well seated in the middle of the rear banquette, Lucas opened his case and took out his portable workstation with the cable kit to connect to the electrical and Internex ports of the car to boost the signal through the vehicle's built-in antennas. Setting up the cables properly was so easy the youth could do it with his eyes on something else if he needed to multi-task. Once everything was wired, he began the boot-up sequence then set the machine on the seat next to himself so he could take off his hat, scarf and loosen the heavy coat around his chest to permit easier breathing and movement.

The moment the CPU sounded it was ready to work, Lucas put it on his thighs, opening his
The teen closed his eyes and took a deep calming breath. Finally, something was going his way besides the train ride. Taking a few minutes to regulate his breathing and center his thoughts, the adolescent began to type through a series of messages to several agencies and organizations thanking them for acknowledging the reception and study of his case file and request for assistance against Lawrence. Once the polite missives were sent out, he answered the lawyer delegated by the firm to be his titular representative to confirm the hotel appointment. When that was done, he checked his voice mail by using a mirror function he had programmed in the portable station that allowed the smartphone and sat-phone chip-sets built into the device to use similar communication frequencies and applications by activating a separate window to control that specific circuitry. There were a few messages, very angry and not amused at all, from Lawrence and the same bozo at the NCQ drydock complaining about his absence from America and promising dire retaliations for it. Said threats were copied over to the dozen foreign ghost servers Lucas employed to keep his stash of incriminating evidence safe and then he called them back to answer.

After making certain the comms management suite's recording function was active and streaming live, he called his father and the NCQ minion together on video conference, regardless of the hour or Time zone, and answered them at the same time. "Well hello gentlemen." Lucas said, keeping a polite tone since he knew it would all be used in open court later on. "I received your Internex messages and am finally set to respond. I am presently in a pause, en route towards my hotel which I will reach in about an hour so I finally took my messages and called you both just as soon as I got them. I am in Canada, in Vancouver's Downtown District, and I have no plans or desires to go southward to NCQ, nor westward to Pearl Harbor either. Your much vaunted flagship will just have to function without me."

(Two Steps From Hell – Cannon in D minor)

The navy sailor was stunned silent at the completely unexpected contact at 22:00pm on a secured military line inside the ship itself that had gone straight through the switchboard and the dispatch officer as if they didn't exist. Lieutenant Denalt had heard rumors about the kid genius when he called an old buddy who worked at Stanford in their IT department, but this was beginning to scare him a bit. Lawrence was even more upset as he'd been dragged out of bed by the sound of the Internex console signaling an emergency communication at 05:00am coming in on his secured private line reserved for the WPP and UEO Fleet.

"What the Hell do you thing you're doing, you smarmy little bastard? I gave you ORDERS to get your fetid carcass to NCQ harbor and get on that boat even if it kills you! I have a 'court order' that says it! You're obliged to obey it, and me!" the rabid father exploded, using much cruder speech patterns and tone than he normally did when at his best. Lawrence had a very high opinion of himself and his standing in the community. He always tried to act and show off as being well educated, upper-class 'nobility' of the US's eastern seaboard. Right now, he was showing what he truly was deep down inside.
"Is that so father?" asked Lucas in deceptively mild, urbane tones. He was a better orator than Lawrence and everybody who knew both was aware of this. "Could you tell me why exactly you think that a 15 year old boy has any place aboard a full-service, combat-enabled nuclear attack ship? Because I would like to know and so would several child protection agencies that I contacted."

Snorting like a panting bull, Lawrence dropped himself heavily on the chair besides the bedroom desk and rubbed an angry hand through his tangled mess of hair. Glaring with open contempt at his son, he spat out, "You are a menial little piece of tepid, wet excrement that parasites and infects everything he touches regardless of the damage it will do. You can't stay quiet in the hole I put you in, or even just be discrete when you disobey and leave that hole. I have had it up to my eyeballs with your disobedience, your indocility and your openly disrespectful rebellion against the authority of my will! You are going to find a way to get your stinking diseased ass to that boat and SUBMIT to the POWER and PUNISHMENTS of lieutenant Denalt as I ordered or you will end in jail for the rest of your life!" The completely out-of-control adult bellowed at the screen, spraying it with spittle as he did.

Lucas responded with calm determination to the choleric attitude of his parent. "That's odd Father, because I don't recall seeing any 'court documents' stating you had any 'right or capacity' to place me onboard a military ship, especially one belonging to the fleet created by the international treaty of the UEO. I thought they were in fact NOT concerned by matters of civilian and familial laws since neither of the member states had wanted somebody above them legislating these things. By the way, since it's a 'court order', that means its public and supposed to be archived at the courthouse for consultation by the adverse party as well as Watch Dog groups and law students. Could you tell me which judge, in which city, at what court emitted the 'order'? Also, since I have had the same attorney of record for the last 6 years and you have had to deal with him, why did he not get notarized copies? Or a summons to court to represent my side of the case? In fact, why was I tried in absentia since I wasn't called to testify and rebut your crass allegations? These questions will be needing answers, Father, and soon. Until then, I'm going to be gleefully freezing my ass off in BC's evergreen forests with pleasure."

Lawrence grabbed the Internex monitor with both hands to shake the screen in lieu of his son. Swearing profusely in ways even the sailor thought interesting, the forty-six year old engineer was clearly and openly losing all remaining control over his volatile temper and his gestures as he swiped a water glass of the desk and threw it into the monitor, breaking the glass and denting the viewer. "You listen here, you filthy, sewer dwelling, little piece of runny, maggot spawning shite! Get your flea-bitten fleece back to Florida RIGHT * Fu-ck-ing * NOW mongrel back-alley cur! I want you on that boat before Saturday morning at 09:00am or I'll go up there and beat the life out of you with your own bleeding arm after I rip it off your shoulder!" The criminal parent devolved into the same set of threats he normally used against his only son.

Throwing the glass water carafe at the screen next, the technician howled out "I should'a finished you off two years ago in Stanford but I thought you could be saved from yourself; obviously that was a pipe dream! If you aren't in the UEO Navy's punitive custody by Sunday, I will put every police department and mercenary group I can pay on the hunt to kill you before you do any more damage to my name and reputation! Fuck the laws! And the bleeding heart liberals! Obey my POWER or die!"

Lawrence finished, leaning over the desk with both hands to hold his weight as he was panting too hard to catch his breath easily.

The UEO sailor had barely blinked as he witnessed the supposedly very urbane, highly educated
engineer, the current darling of the UEO Cabinet, degenerate into a stark raving mad lunatic that seemed hell-bent on filicide against his minor-aged son. The boy however just listened calmly with the affected air of boredom the soldier usually saw on the faces of senior officers during meet-&-greets with politos or long paperwork sessions.

(Two Steps From Hell – Victory)

After the older adult had vented his spleen publicly, the submariner watched uneasily as the impressive young businessman raised a thin blond eyebrow and asked in murderously trite tones: "Are you done acting out such childish distemperment on a public, unshielded line or do you need more time to wake up properly in order to act civilized with us?"

Both adults could only look at the flint-blue eyes of the child, so cold and detached, bunkered behind emotional walls thick with steel plates and barbed wires. UEO Navy Lieutenant Denalt thought at that moment that whatever plot Lawrence had cooked up was dead in the water and done with. These were not the eyes of a little child afraid of his daddy's strap or a trip to the shed out back. Those eyes had seen death and maybe even caused it. The sailor forcibly repressed the shiver that wanted to crawl down his back at the realization that maybe he was dodging a bullet here. He hadn't really done any research on Wolenczak's kid before accepting the deal of breaking the boy's body and spirit for a wad of cash. It had sounded like easy money the way the old guy said it. But now? The kid was in a rented limousine, speaking of lawyers he had for years and 'court papers' like he knew how they worked? W-T-F was Wolenczak trying to dump in his arms?

"Excuse me, sirs" the sailor called out, getting the attention of both feuding relatives. "I am lieutenant René Denalt, bosun for the SeaQuest, in charge of crew discipline and orderliness. I would like to see that 'court order' you spoke of, Mr Wolenczak senior, cuz it was never spoken to us that this boy was some difficult case or a – danger – of some sort. And also, we were not told of him having any money or lawyers independently of his parents since that means that he HAS to be present for all negotiations and agreements we hammer out. As he wasn't there or represented, I have to stall the process until it's all made crystal clear and above board. Now, sir, if you could email those notarized copies of the court papers to your son and me at the same time, the UEO's Navy would be much obliged."

Lawrence looked at the 29 year old sailor with enraged contempt in his eyes. "Screw you, coward! You can forget the money I promised you to break him and make him submissive to me! I'll find somebody with balls and a backbone to do it! Your boat can sink for all I care! But mark my words, boy! I will be calling UEO Fleet Head admiral Noyce as soon as the hour permits it, and I will be seeing a SATISFYING conclusion to this sordid story! Against BOTH of you!" Lawrence cut the line on his side, leaving the two others to their retched, worthless lives.

(Two Steps From Hell – Star Sky)

Now alone on the comms, Lucas looked at the UEO officer for real, giving him a cold, calculative, visual inspection that had the man twice his age squirming in discomfort on the other end. Denalt felt like he was chained to an autopsy table getting cut up while he was still warm enough to ask questions to the doctor that cut him. Shaking himself of the feeling, Denalt told Lucas "If you want to, we could bury the hatchet and come to an agreement against your old man. What he wanted me to do to you isn't fit for a rapist in jail, so I guess you would want to be aware of it and have some preparations, in case he does get to you..."

"Bury the hatchet, you say..." Lucas whispered menacingly as he removed the transparent vinyl cover from his cane's pommel to stroke the ax blade visibly with his thumb so the felonious sailor saw the gesture clearly on his monitor. As the sailor began to sweat large droplets along the sides of
his face, the adolescent settled backwards more restfully into the banquette, fishing a chocolate bar and plastic bottle of orange juice from the deep hip pockets of his trench coat as he got comfortable for the next round of negotiations.

(Two Steps From Hell – Winterspell)

"I hope for your sake, lieutenant that you are not wasting my time. Unless you have written or filmed proof of your monetary transactions with Lawrence, we are done here. And then, you will find out painfully that my parents have not taught me any of the virtues of mercy." the juvenile scientist spoke out in slow, carefully elocuted words. If this subhuman 'thing' wanted to turn coats on Lawrence, who was Lucas to keep him from it? Besides, the entire conversation was all recorded for posterity so even if the man died or refused to testify, the electronic films would suffice.

Northern hospitality

(Lord of the Rings – The Shire)

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 19:43pm

Vancouver city; Stanley Park

British Columbia, Canada

It had taken almost a half hour more for Lucas to conclude his conversation and deal with lieutenant Denalt in such a way that the man spoke out loud what was needed to hang himself and Lawrence at the same time. The chauffeur had heard nothing of the conversations as the partition between the driver's compartment and the passenger cabin had been closed. The teenager opened the panel when he was done and ready to roll onwards to the hotel. After giving the go-ahead, he closed his workstation down and placed it back in the briefcase for the duration of transit. That laptop system was unique, hard to build and configure properly so he wasn't taking any risks by having it open during the trip. When the case was closed, he took up his smartphone to call the hotel management to warn them of his coming in, exactly in the time period that had been foreseen, so that a manager was available to take him up to show him the suite upon his arrival.

The road to the hotel was indeed an hour long. They rolled on Hastings Street going west until the end where they did an 'S' turn to join with Georgia Street to traverse the large Stanley Park. The limousine rolled along Georgia Street into a stretch of highway interchange then unto the Stanley Park Causeway that changed name to Lions Gate Bridge Road in the middle of the park. The roadway left the park at Prospect Point to cross the massive iconic Lions Gate Bridge over the entry of Vancouver Harbour and into the West Vancouver sector. The Lions Gate Bridge Road continued all the way to another highway interchange to turn westward on Marine Drive across the Capilano River bridge into Park Royal District and then right up north on 6th Avenue, turning right again on Clyde Avenue until they reached the hotel complex on the shores of the Capilano River, surrounded by trees and snow.

{ SQ } - { Wooden box Deluxe } - { SQ }

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 20:51pm

Daleminton Hotel, shore of the Capilano River

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

The youth had not used a travel agency, preferring to do everything himself to control the process and have personal contact inside each train line, the hotel management and any other service provider
he could need to ask extras from to make things simpler on his life. His current health and lack of physical strength didn't leave him any other choices but to plan for the worst possible situations so the by-passes and contingencies were in place from the onset.

(The Hobbit – Far over the Misty Mountains cold)

The young man's research over the web had found a respectable 4+ stars highly appreciated hotel complex styled like a traditional mountain country inn. It was composed of three main buildings standing seven storeys each, with a family restaurant in the south edifice, a business-type restaurant in the middle edifice with a separate tavern & night club combo in the north edifice. At the back of the inn was located a pair of separate edifices built in the solarium type.

The solarium located centrally was the pool hall. It's main floor was subdivided with the tall vaulted main hall holding an olympic size swimming pool surrounded by cedar benches and coffee tables for relaxing by the waterside. There were also six semi-private side rooms, all on the mountain's view side, for hot tubs with cedar benches, a full snack bar, a dozen private full washrooms for showering and relief and a couple of telecoms cabins. The mezzanine level was split in two sectors; a thin wrap-around balcony overlooking the main pool with many small two-seat tables for couples and the enclosed private rooms located above the snack bar for massages.

The second solarium, located behind the south edifice, was a sports & fitness club open to any who pay one of the membership packages without need to rent a room in the hotel. In fact, one of their specials included access to the otherwise private pool complex that normally accepted only the people reserving rooms for several days. The sports zone was also designed with a main floor where the running track, fighting rinks and most weights machines were placed. The mezzanine had half of the washrooms, a full snack bar emphasizing healthy eating and a thin wrap-around balcony for two-seat tables for relaxing while having a snack.

The third plot was fenced-in land behind the northern edifice that served as open-air parking lot for the clients that rent rooms for any length of time. It also had a small service station for gasoline and two enclosed garages for mechanical work built close to the hotel edifice. The private garage station was owned by the hotel and open 24 hours every day, even holidays. As an added safety, the crew from the service station had enough varied skills that they could handle some of the building's mechanics like plumbing leaks or clogs, electricity and basic carpentry thus giving the hotel a small measure of in-house workmanship to stall problems until the external professionals called in arrived.

The hotel faced inside the district to the west while the rear was towards the east and the shores of the Capilano River; thus the 'left' was north and the 'right' was south. The outside of the three main buildings was magnificent in a northern country type of aesthetic that gave tourists a genuine sense of vacation time and peace at the end of the road. The entire complex was made to look like a great multi-level log cabin with wooden banisters on the many wide balconies and rustic dormers in the slanted wood shingle roofs. The huge 'A'-frame roof supported by eight trios of round logs that served as car port to cover the main guest entry in the front driveway really had a serious mountain home feel, even in the early evening darkness.

Lucas had consulted the website of the hotel to find what he could about the structural specs. The entire hotel complex was actually built solidly with a steel girder & re-bar frame covered in pumped concrete then clad in decorative natural half-logs on the outside with all solid natural wood planks inside. Add plush inch-thick carpeting, decorative wall tapestries and a plethora of wood burning stone fireplaces or cast iron stoves as fit the needs of the rooms and you had the perfect 'mountain chalet look' all over.

{ SQ } - { Cedar closet } - { SQ }
Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 21:08pm

Daleminton Hotel, shore of the Capilano River

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Under the lights of the car port since it had been dark outside before they left Downtown, the young man finished signing the chauffeur's work ticket then took his wheeled trunk and carry-on bag from the car's trunk to pull them into the hotel lobby. Given how tired he was, he didn't pay much attention to the internal décor beyond seeing lots and lots and LOTS of varnished wood on the walls and furniture of the cozy sitting areas and massive round log welcome counter. The two monumental river stone fireplaces were exquisite and invitingly warm but not enough to make him stop on his march to his new 'home'.

A quick show of his reservation print-out with ID card and passport had the evening shift manager coming to greet him with a smile and extended hand. The adolescent counted himself lucky that it was the same older woman who had taken care of him over the phone several days ago. It would avoid problems if his extras hadn't been done correctly and he needed to file a grievance along the request to complete the job properly for his usage. Lucas had reserved a full suite for 30 days in the central 'business' wing of the complex to avoid little kids or partying young couples bothering him. Since it meant he also got the Internex access by fiber optics instead of general WiFi, it would have been his default choice anyways.

(The Hobbit – Rivendell)

Besides the caliber of web access, the young man had two specific criteria to choose the suite he wanted. He needed a room as close to the ground floor as possible to make an evacuation in case of fire or paramedic intervention easier due to the health problems that had been recurring since the last beating his dad had inflicted two years ago. Because of those troubles, Lucas anticipated many medical treatments that would cause more mobility issues in the near future so the room had to be fully accessible, even to a walker or wheelchair. Of course, if the treatments were too long or complex, he would be obliged to leave to relocate near the hospital, and it would have to be a livable space big enough for the full-time valet-driver and live-in nurse he would hire to stay mobile and active in his own defense. Secondly, the teenager wanted a room that was oriented towards the wilderness, not houses and streets. He wanted a sense of vacationing, of isolation and forest peace. The other reason for the month-long rental was that Lucas had already taken appointments with three different real estate professionals for the period between Christmas and New Year's Day celebrations. His goal was to find either a condo or townhouse with enough services that he wouldn't have to worry about housekeeping until he was ready to buy an actual detached house big enough for him and at least three full time employees. Since he wanted to purchase his home in the northern parts of town, out of the heavily populated zones to avoid traffic jams and noisy neighbors, then he had to look in the suburbs at closest or the rural areas at the farthest. Due to his health and technology based contracts, it wasn't logical to go so far out of urban zones that he would end up buying bare land and building a new homestead off-grid, even though he could hire pros and have it done for him easy enough.

The mature female manager, Mrs Rhoda Ohyun, was a short, black haired, green eyed chinese grand-mother who had seen a lot in her almost thirty years as manager for Daleminton. She was very accommodating with her young guest for good causes. He was polite and mild mannered, speaking in urbane tones when his soft yet firm voice was heard. She enjoyed having to deal with him compared to other, older patrons who thought they were handing her a gift by their presence. Lucas was demanding and very exacting in his needs, but also proportionally understanding of the time
crunch and costs associated with his demands. He had not balked at paying; he only asked for a fully itemized quotation for his review before authorizing the work and then an invoice with the final price including any rush-job surcharges or unforeseen extras. Everything was named and addressed to his company seated in Buffalo City, New York State, USA, to his supplies & payments manager. If all her clients could be so professional in their attitude, her job (and life) would be much easier. Not to mention that many teenagers she had known could use this boy as a role model of good manners and public behavior, including her own sons back at that age. They had been decent kids, but not like this one.

Manager Ohyun insisted that Lucas let a bellhop load his luggage onto a brass dolly to push for them all the way to the room instead of dragging the whole batch himself. Feeling tired and worn out by the day despite that he had essentially slept the morning away in the train car, the youth agreed and placed everything, including his heavy trench coat, hat, scarf and gloves on the wheeled cart, staying dressed in his business jacket that he opened to breathe more easily inside the rather cozy hotel. With nothing left but the cold steel cane to lean on, the teenager signaled he was ready to move. They went up the two floors in a glass-sided elevator, passing by the crescent shape lobby mezzanine on the first floor with its cozy river stone fireplace, coffee shop kiosk and many deep plush sofas and couches in which to sit while waiting for a friend or business meeting. This level also had the closed conference rooms for private meetings and the large banquet hall for celebrations like weddings or graduation parties.

Arriving at the second floor, they walked out of the elevator and to door #204, just as promised over the phone. The businessman suite had a simplistic but completely furnished floor plan that was exactly what customers needed for their lengthy business voyages.

The entry of the suite was right in the middle of the kitchen area; there was a bench seat with space under the seat for shoes, a tall backboard that had hooks for coats and an elevated shelf for hats and gloves on the right of the door. On the left was a tall, thin closet to hold the suite's vacuum cleaner attachments, mops, buckets and such for daily maintenance by room service. The kitchen counters and appliances were placed in an extra-wide 'U' shape that optimized the galley-style design. The right side had a set of wide deep counters with a professional 6-hob gas range/oven, followed by stacked built-in toaster oven, microwave oven and then the extra-large 2-door fridge. On the left side, the other wide counter began past the closet and held a huge deluxe automatic hot/cold drinks brewer fit for a restaurant located next to wide, deep double sinks with a garbage grinder in one basin. Between the doors of the lesser bedroom and bathroom there was a small glass-fronted bar buffet with hanging stemware rack. All the alcohol had been removed and replaced by a variety of Perrier flavored spring waters and colored sparkling fruit juice coolers in individual bottles that imitate well known wine flavors. Lucas had asked for the 'no alcohol' orders to be written as an item on his invoice to prove the government that he was following local laws during his refugee claims hearing.

Passed the kitchen zone was the dedicated dining area. The artisanal table was made of twisted natural pine limbs and roots, cleaned and varnished a clear shiny beige tone that supported a large glass pane with discrete soft green LED's to under-light the table for relaxing evening meals. There were eight chairs made of natural pine wood, deeply padded with oiled deerskin leather upholstery. A buffet with all the Daleminton branded dishes, flatware and table linens was placed against the right-hand wall.

(The Hobbit – I see fire)

The living area was separated from the kitchen & dining zone by a large free-standing monumental mountain stone fireplace. The hearth was enormous with a big four-sided cast iron insert that gave a cooking surface for 3 pans and baking grill inside on the dining room side in case of power outage. There was a wide sectional five-seat couch with 'L' shaped lounging extensions on both sides, two
pivoting Lazy Boy reclining sofas and a low wooden coffee table, all oriented towards the right wall. On that right hand wall was a massive 3 foot high by 6 foot wide restaurant-grade view-screen surrounded by decorative rustic pineewood built-in storage units finished with open fronts. The exterior wall was ¾ windows, composed of the folding accordion doors that led to the balcony shared with the master bedroom.

On the left hand of the suite were situated the two enclosed bedrooms with king-sized beds and monumental mountain stone fireplaces in each. One room was the 'Boss' room with access to the balcony by a set of accordion-style folding doors while the other was the 'Employee' room or private office depending on the needs of the travelers and it's door was located just after the kitchen counters.

There was a single extra-large common bathroom for the whole suite, located between the bedrooms with the door facing the huge central fireplace. The bathroom was separated into three sub-zones; the roll-in shower and handicapped-support bathtub combo were enclosed at the far end, the toilet cubicle in the middle and the double vanity with two stools and floor-to-ceiling segmented tailor's mirror was at the entry. There was a cast iron wood burning device with glass-sided firebox in the wall between bath and toilet to act as both a romantic display and functional backup water heater in case the electricity and central gas-burning boilers were offline.

There was no washer & dryer nor any dishwasher since the hotel's room service would come pick up dishes, trays, soiled linens, clothes and trash bags twice per day at relatively reliable hours.

{ SQ } - { Picky client } - { SQ } 

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Lucas had asked for the bed and unneeded furnishings in the bedroom without patio access to be removed so he could set up his mobile network equipment in a secure locking area. The hotel management were already well aware of his electronic devices coming in from UPS Overland Services; the concierge had emailed him confirmation of the hotel's reception of the heavy shipping boxes at around 09:17am while he slept on the Via train. The two large wheeled thermoplastic transport crates were already placed in the empty room, waiting for him to unpack and set up.

Did the hotel protest or say it couldn't do this because he's too young or didn't have an adult signing the papers for him? Of course not! The nice receptionist that took his reservations passed him off to her shift manager, his current escort, a much more experienced woman employed by the hotel for over forty-five years, who then explained the costs of the extras he was asking for. Lucas had replied by asking her if the option to pay for an increase to the hotel's insurance policies included in every room rental was available due to the value of the equipments he would house in her building. His kind, polite business demeanor made the woman answer in the same tones, listing the types of special-case coverage they offered through their insurance provider and what the terms and costs would be.

Since the young man had quite agreeably paid them the work hours needed to clear out the room of all furniture except one set of low service counters next to the stone fireplace with the coffee maker, mini-fridge and its furnishings, the hotel manager was quite happy to oblige his needs. Just like his requests to bolster the electrical system's stability while adding extra high voltage electrical outlets, establish several secured fiber optics sockets, extra telephone lines, extra ventilation as per his schematics and use his own electronic locking device on the door of that specific bedroom so the chambermaids didn't accidentally touch something that could be damaging or costly to fix.

As Lucas explained to the manager; "When a computer program is doing it's compilation run, it can't be stopped or you scrap the entire run and start over again. Since it can take several hours to do the entire prep then two to four hours to compile the program into a usable format, it was better to avoid
issues. If I have to use the bathroom, answer a lengthy phone call with a client or worse, go for the medical appointments that I will have due to my injuries, and possibly surgery, the risks are too high for problems to arise. I simply can't believe that every employee in the hotel will remember to stay out or not touch the office setup I will create."

The manager told him he hadn't asked for anything out of this world to date, just rare, but since he paid and his corporate Visa card had passed without a hitch, then he would receive the services required. The fact was that Lucas had cooperated extensively with Mrs Ohyun by sending over digitally the notarized copies of his passport, Blue Shield insurance card, train tickets for Amtrak and Via Rail, Canadian customs forms for his machines and also the paperwork to ask 'investor immigrant' status in the country along with dual citizenship. She had also been given the references for his lawyer, physician of record and psychotherapist of record too. Maybe, just maybe, the young man didn't suffer a deficit of credibility with the older woman because he had buried her under a bureaucratic avalanche like an adult businessman would do. Maybe...?

Respite by the roadside

(The Hobbit – The Shire)

Thursday 17th of December, 2020; 21:24pm

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Now finally alone with himself and his thoughts, the young migrant could finally breathe easy and let fall the mental mask and shields he had maintained all day in front of everybody. He would need them back tomorrow morning for the lawyers but he could stay quiescent until then. Walking around the suite to memorize the lay of the land, he opened the network room that he would have to set up before going to bed. The two large wheeled transit crates were there, waiting placidly for their master to open and deploy their capacities unto the cyber-world again.

Taking off his jacket and opening his brown flannel shirt to mid-chest, the teen went to the master bedroom to change clothes completely so he could be comfortable during his obliged burst of late-evening activity. Setting the carry-on bag on the bed, he began the process of taking off his boots and sweaty socks, emptying his pockets of every little item that had accumulated in two days then changing outfits. He would drop his travel clothes in the bathroom hamper for the laundry service to pick-up later on around 23:00pm when they did the rounds.

Now dressed in comfortable well worn dark purple jeans and a new black turtleneck long sleeved shirt with the Stanford logo on the pocket on the left breast, Lucas placed his smartphone in the shirt pocket, put on the traveler's belt and filled his pockets with wallets, keys and other necessities. Just in case he had to run. Lawrence knew where he was, so did the UEO as that was part of the defensive scheme; be publicly visible so he could officially ask for help and protection from the Canadian government. The downside was of course that he was now semi-immobile and very visible on all fronts. He would need to place his defenses on the war footing ASP and then plan for a quick getaway in case the worse came to be and the police or government decided to not protect him.

Padding barefoot across the sinfully plush, warm carpet back to his new workshop with his aluminum briefcase in hand, he resolved to set-up tonight the first half of his masterful piece of electronics, cybernetics and software engineering; the mobile Cyberghast hub, before going to bed.

{ SQ } - { Demanding child } - { SQ }
Going into the office/workshop room, he slid open the twin-paneled pocket doors to make certain the original locks had been removed and the doors were solidly encased in the slide frame. Satisfied with his findings, he went over to the walls where the new sockets had been expertly put in as per his – expensively paid – exacting demands.

Regular telephony; 2 new wall plates, each being 4 ports non-switch with distinct lines, separate ## numbers, with integrated power surge protection and individual reset switch on each port. Good.

Network/Internex; 2 new wall plates, each being 4 ports fiber-optics active hub with integrated power surge protection, breaker switches and configurable firmware on mobile flash-ROM chipset individual to each port so as to have four IP addresses that can be mutated at will with specialty industrial equipment and know-how. Which he had on hand. Good.

Basic Electrical; four new wall plates each having four AC 120 volts 60 Hertz, with integrated power surge protection, individual breaker switches for each socket and small LED to indicate which plug was active or dead. Good.

Heavy Electrical; two new wall plates each having two AC 240 volts 60 Hertz, with integrated power surge protection, individual breaker switches for each socket and small LED to indicate which plug was active or dead. Good.

Ventilation; bigger incoming grate with four large fans to push cool air into the room 24/7 until he packed up and left. Wall mounted controls with dials to indicate the state & speed of each fan. The entire system was power surge protected with individual electrical wires, breakers and switches for each fan plus the master interrupter, all visible on the wall plate controller.

All normal light switches in the room were already sliding dimmers so they stayed untouched.

The fireplace was unlit and would stay cold, with a solidly bolted grate that could be opened if the deadbolt on it was undone. As the room had to be cold for the equipment to operate, it was imperative to keep all heating to the minimal amount. The empty fireplace meant that the cold air from the ceiling fans could come down into the room, circulate and then exit through the inert conduit and out of the building above the roofs thusly helping to evacuate the incredible amount of constant heat generated by the mobile systems.

In terms of budget and logic, some people might think it was a fool’s errand when he could have just bought a commercial condo in an office building or even bought a full house and settled for that but neither would have done the job. It would have taken several weeks of delays for the selection and transactions to happen at the soonest; where would he live or work during that time? Then, any place he rented would have needed utilities upgrades to support the mobile systems anyways while any purchased emplacement would need even bigger upgrades to sustain both mobile & permanent equipments. Secondly, the vast majority of locals and houses would not have the level of security and living human support that the hotel complex offered, especially for a short duration. When those variables were considered fully, then you add the multiple services and products offered in-house by the hospitality around the suite and it became a simple choice to make for a short duration of a month to a year until he could renovate or build a permanent edifice of his own.

In terms of budget, he was a multi-millionaire with steady yearly revenue above 2 million USD since he was 11 years old and Wolenbahn had netted a profit around 37 million USD for the year 2020 that was ending soon due to contracts with The World Bank and several other financial or research institutions. By leaving most of that specific money in the many 'outside' companies he had created, he could put all the bills on the business expense accounts and claim tax deductions at the end of the
fiscal year to recover some of the functioning expenses. By optimizing the business suppliers’ tax breaks and deductions, paying on credit card or bank loaned credit margin, the fees of which were deductible as well, and offering occasional exchanges of services instead of money payments meant he could afford this setup easily.

And that was just with WE revenues and funds on hand; if he actually started to deploy the vast 200 year old wealth of Wise Apothecary & Chemists then he could easily have upwards of 400,000,000$ in cash to maneuver with. Not that he would do that; it would be much wiser to contract business mortgages or short term company loans than take out the cash. Then, there were also the investment portfolios, the trust funds, and the multiple manors, offices, laboratories, workshops and distribution warehouses that had the hundreds of employees hard at work that could all be put as collateral to get bigger, longer mortgages if need be. No, Lucas wasn't hurting for cash or resources; it was time that he lacked, time and foresight to be aware of the coming troubles.

All of THAT wealth, most of it hidden, didn't mean he would throw money in a pit. No; he simply knew that with Lawrence gunning for his life, he'd better use it while he had it. There was no telling when he could lose either the cash or the freedom to make his own decisions himself but the companies and trust funds at least were all in his name alone and no court in the USA could change that while he yet lived. Which of course Lawrence was working incessantly to change. As such, any payments made that would insure his freedom by establishing surveillance webs, remote control zones and warning devices had to be accepted and assumed as the necessities they were. And now there was US Naval Intel in the mix, as if church groups and mercenaries weren't enough to make him stress out already.

Still, mentally reviewing the Daleminton invoices, it came to a staggering amount:

**Hotel rental;**
- Room, daily rate, adjusted for monthly rental (550$/day) coming to (16,500$)
- Insurance upgrade for industrial equipments (2,500$) for one month, extensible
- Sub-total (19,000$)

Just the suite rental price spoke of luxury and quality, obscenely so. Add the many costs for the extra electricity, network and venting and you could scare off anybody from ever having such projects.

**Standard Telephony;**
- 2 extra drop-lines from the utilities poles (9,000$ x 2)
- New 12 port switch module on the hotel's phone server (2,000$)
- Passing 8 new individual phone wires from the server to the suite (1,600$)
- Wall mounts inside the suite (400$ x 2) + install (300$)
- sub-total (22,700$)
- Rush job fees (4,000$) charged by local telecoms company

**Fiber-optics;**
- 2 extra T-3 capacity drop-lines from the utilities poles (15,000$ x 2)
Dedicated Internex industrial 12 port auto-switch module (11,000$)
Passing 8 dedicated individual fiber-optics from the server to the suite (4,800$)
Wall mounts inside the suite (1,100$ x 2) + install (900$)
sub-total (48,900$)
Rush job fees (20,000$) charged by local telecoms company

Standard electrical AC 120 Volts;
Dedicated main breaker panel '4 switches' in hotel machinery basement (4,000$)
Dedicated breaker panel '16 switches' in the suite (3,000$)
Passing 4 dedicated main cables from basement breakers to the suite (1,000$ x 4)
Laboratory-grade wall mounts inside the suite (300$ x 4) + install (400$)
sub-total (12,600$)
Rush job fees (4,000$) charged by the electrical contractors

Heavy electrical AC 240 Volts;
Dedicated main breaker panel '2 switches' in hotel machinery basement (4,000$)
Dedicated breaker panel '4 switches' in the suite (3,000$)
Passing 2 dedicated main cables from basement breakers to the suite (1,600$ x 2)
Laboratory-grade wall mounts inside the suite (400$ x 2) + install (260$)
sub-total (11,260$)
Rush job fees (4,000$) charged by the electrical contractors

Ventilation fans;
Rebuilding ceiling to expand fan grate (2,000$)
Workshop-grade 4-fan grate w/sensors (850$)
Dedicated breaker panel '4 switches' inside the suite (1,400$)
Dedicated electrical wires individualized by fan (300$ x 4)
sub-total (5,450$)
Rush job fees (1,000$) charged by the electrical contractors

Total parts & labor for upgrades: (100,910$)
Total rush fees: (33,000$)
Hotel part paid on contractual terms: (-26,800$) returned to Lucas
Because the improvements would stay permanently in the hotel and become usable by anybody when Lucas left the complex, the management had accepted to absorb 20% of his expenditures in exchange for his doing a full sweep and security check of their airwaves, wires and servers, followed by connecting them to his remote support & management hub. They had essentially decided that the young man knew damn well what he was doing so they wanted to hire him as an external contractor to establish a higher level of network safety and efficiency for their organization and clientele. Eventually, they planned to ask him to redesign and rebuilt the entire electrical, telephonic, fiber-optics and ventilation ductworks inside the complex when the usable life of the systems expired in around 6 years. Their insurance provider and the city's new building code would push them to do the changes and renovate by gutting out the 35 year old infrastructures so having a competent contractor already attached to them by active service plans was a good idea.

Now; the fees had piled up at an incredible speed and it was time to get his money's worth in results.

Lucas turned his attention to the large wheeled thermoplastic box marked 'Wolenbahn Electronics International Inc – CG/MH adm/sysop' to get the basic setup to secure the room and then the suite around it. Using the complex custom biometric scanner-lock built into the freight box, the boy typed in a code and then spoke pass phrases in four languages to make the security system disarm and give access to the contents.

After the thermoplastic covering clicked, the four sides of the box all slid upwards on small pneumatic pistons, allowing to see and access the active safety buffer between the cartage container and the actual payload inside. The tempered glazed steel panels of the actual safety carrier were ½ inch thick and crisscrossed on both sides by inlaid superconductor metal wire that linked to the 'box integrity' scanners to validate the state of the payload and deny forcible access to thieves. Anybody who cut those sensitive wires would not like the results. It was called 'active security measures' for a reason.

After going through another biometric scanner with four more languages, the inner crate was finally open and ready to serve. Those steel panels were hinged along the vertical post near the 'back' of the dolly and had three other hinges to fold like an accordion to have less trouble opening in confined spaces like inside a cargo truck or small self-storage hangar. This box contained a set of big oil & spring pistons that held up a combination of flat table, three articulated solid keyboards and three articulated Internex enabled monitors that pulled out and deployed to form a mobile command post, chair not included. In other compartments were the electronic locks that would be installed on the office doors and several models of full-color cameras for remote surveillance; some wired, some not and some heavy industrial models that had both capacities as well as a motorized joint.

Lucas began by opening his briefcase that he set on the floor by the doors and then placed his portable workstation atop the freight box that was still closed, using it as a high workbench. As soon as his unique laptop was online, he activated the personal comms management suite and elongated the antennas from the sides of the monitor to test out the cellular and satellite signals for strength and quality. A quick, easy setup of cables had the electricity, conventional phone line and fiber-optics port connected for testing as well so he could know just what exactly was going on inside the walls and utilities of the hotel.

Whilst the 'small' portable was running its usual downloads of messages and tests, Lucas went back to the doors, armed with a locksmith kit and a cardboard box that held his custom built lock. In less than ten minutes of manual labor, the new electronic security system was attached and ready to boot
Taking another long wire from his briefcase, the teen plugged the custom-made cable into the unique proprietary socket on the door lock then plugged the other end into a similar socket on his laptop CPU. Once the connection was established in full-duplex, he began the onerous, 15 minute job of priming and coding the lock’s circuitry so the biometric scanner and card-swipe reader would recognize only those parameters he would authorize. That done, he could now finish the install by connecting the custom proprietary power cord, telephony and network cables to the Cyberghast management hub.

The locking device had several ways to insure that if the locks were broken or the power went out, he would get messaged about it. Inside the body of the lock was a wireless cellphone circuit with antenna, then a classic telephone wire and a fiber-optics network cable. There was even a dedicated chipset with the function of signaling through the electrical power cord on a specific modulation and frequency that would get picked up and forwarded by an inter-modal signal repeater he would discretely install elsewhere in the hotel. The ventilation ducts in the ceiling above the bathroom should be hidden enough yet easily accessible when needed without having to leave the suite and risk being seen in areas he shouldn’t visit.

{ SQ } - { I see you with my many glowing eyes } - { SQ }

On top of the masterful piece of locking engineering, he would install several cameras in the room, suite, hallway and balcony to remotely monitor what happened to his equipment and personal effects. Some cameras would be big and visible to deter idiots whilst small hidden ones would make certain that if the visible cams were off-line, he would still see what happened, by whom and why. Going back to the open crate, he pulled out the first big camera to mount it high on the wall facing the only doorway into the room. As requested, the hotel had installed several hard wood reinforcement plates at the desired areas so he could do his own installations. Lucas got the small wireless power tools from the cubbies inside the cart then used them to put in place the base-plate, then the motorized joints and then the actual camera body which would get a set of cables: power, regular phone line and network. Once the main camera was wired to the Cyberghast hub in the appropriate sockets just like the door lock, Lucas unplugged his laptop from the wall sockets to plug it instead into the private hub’s System Operator’s backup terminal socket.

As soon as the idling electronics in the battery-sustained hub detected the presence of it’s master brain, it triggered the extension of the desk & monitor station. At the same time, four pneumatic jacks under the cart extended downwards into the carpet until the dolly lifted off the floor by two full inches and stabilized at level. Several LED's of varying colors blinked as the monstrous creation woke up the first half of its body, waiting for its master's will. Inside five minutes, the boot-up sequence was done and the CG-hub had scanned and recognized the door lock and camera as its primary safeties, all enslaved to the remote overwatch capacities of the portable workstation and synchronized smartphone through the heavily encrypted 'Virtual-Private-Network' that Lucas had coded and ciphered for his own – exclusive – personal usage.

{ SQ } - { Nesting in the woods } - { SQ }

(The Hobbit – The Shire)

The rest of the long lonely evening was spent in relaxing, solitary work as cameras were unpacked, installed and configured. The teenager interrupted his work, closing the office doors and locking them, to use the toilet, splash some warm water on his face and make himself an excellent cappuccino with the automated brewer on the kitchen counter. Come 23:00pm he went to tour the kitchen pantry and fridge in detail before deciding that he wanted to take a real break, not make more
trouble for himself. Everything had good basic staples stored, but taking the time to cook would not make the security setup get built faster whereas ordering room service would let him work and then truly call it a night when the meal got here ready to eat without efforts on his part.

Of course, what Lucas didn't want to really admit was that he could barely put frozen french fries in a toaster oven without burning them to ash; the idea of him cooking something complex was not to be entertained lightly at this point in time. Given his young age and how the boarding situation had been in the brownstone, the adult surveillant had been in charge of making meals and stocking the fridges and pantries for the kids to be fed in the simplest way possible. Then, after he was forced to live alone in his office suite back in San Francisco, anything he didn't order from the deli downstairs or the chinese place two streets over had to be small enough to fit in the microwave oven or the toaster oven. Even his personal coffee maker had been simplistic in the extreme since it was a Keurig counter-top capsule brewer; any idiot could use those without issues. All he did was fill up the water reservoir every morning and even setting the thing's timer to brew at fixed hours to wake him up was easy.

Of course, the timer on a Keurig brewer was a digital computer, so that did explain WHY he thought the coffee machine was easy to use. Pasty white little runt, he was...

It did mean however that Lucas had never been showed how to cook much of anything so letting him loose in the kitchen would be done incrementally. In slow increments, to keep it safe. And given that he had obtained a bachelor's degree in 'Laboratory Techniques, Equipments and IT management for Health Sciences' at the age of ten, it was the height of irony that while he could mix chemicals to prepare a prescription drug on a doctor's request, he could barely boil water with a kettle on the hob without starting a fire in the appliances.

Snort! - He really had a weird life!

Sitting himself at the dining table to take a few minutes to savor his fresh coffee, the teen used the medium sized hard-wired datapad set in the furniture's middle that was the hotel's supplied method of browsing their services or placing orders if you were comfortable with web merchants and humanless purchases. Finding what he wanted easily enough in the main restaurant's host table which was available through the night during holiday season, the adolescent bought himself a nicely sized meal of fire braised elk steak with grilled veggies, mashed potatoes and peppercorn-mushroom sauce. Since it was a full-meal special, he also got the French-Canadian pea soup and piece of black forest cake along the main course. The restaurant confirmed delivery inside 45 minutes to his suite so he got back to work in the office room.

With a dozen cameras out of twenty and one of the three phantom signal repeaters already installed, he could now do the secondary boot-up of the CG-hub. That meant unrolling the heavy AC 220 volt power cables from the primary cart and plugging them in crossed sockets. One cable went into socket A of plate 1 then the other cable went into socket B of plate 2. After that he had to connect the telephone lines, the fiber-optics and call the hotel management office to warn them he was about to activate the industrial-grade systems which would now drain a significant amount of electricity on their grid.

Lucas had to wait 5 minutes for the manager to call down to the janitors' office so they would activate the circuits since they had been kept inert until the request for power came down. As soon as the LED's on the wall plates glowed, the teen ramped up the ventilation fans then took specialty custom keys out of his pocket to unlock the breaker panel on the Cyberghast hub carriage. Each breaker to activate a segment of the device had its own key and there was a specific, secret order to follow when lighting up the machinery or else it would self-destruct QUITE destructively. Shunting two 220 volt lines' worth of juice into circuit boards, monitors, 6 lithium-ion battery arrays and 2
acid-based power regulators would result in an explosive meltdown of epic proportions and severely hurt anybody in the room. And that was before the active security measures triggered too.

"Kill it with fire; FIRE cleanses All" goes the proverb... And BURN it would, if triggered wrong.

As the distinctive song of live electricity running through the components was heard, the juvenile prodigy began to truly relax. Soon, he would be back in full swing. He had been unable to oversee his company's many offices and production workshops for too long already. And the big clients would probably want some form of assurance he was still alive and well to supply them with answers to their problems, no matter where he was physically located. The youth smiled a true genuine smile of happiness when the three monitors above the extensible desk lit up, displaying his default background imagery and start-up routine with the left-hand screen having the desktop applications already active and waiting. The right-hand screen had the personal comms management suite active and processing all his messages on all channels whilst also downloading from the portable station and synchronizing with all his devices, including his hidden button-camera recorder's film archive.

When the first half of the hub was fully active, Lucas glanced at the second dolly indolently, telling himself that he could do that tomorrow afternoon or even in the evening. The rack-mount servers were nice but not necessary just yet and he didn't need the specialty hacking and splicing virtual tools for the coming night. He would open and activate that box of malice at a later time, when the need was there.

Night cap

(The Hobbit – The Shire)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 00:01am (midnight)

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

With about ten minutes left before his meal arrived, Lucas packed the power tools into the carriage cubbies and locked all the small compartments tightly then unplugged his portable workstation for the night. He would put it on the nightstand by his bed and reconnect it tomorrow when it was time to finish the build of the CG hub's secondary component. Making certain all his devices were in place, including the button-cam and recorder, the adolescent walked out of the room, closed all the regular lights and locked the office door with the new massive electronic lock that beeped, eliciting a mirror beep from the cellphone in his shirt pocket to confirm the lock had engaged.

Going to the master bedroom to dump the workstation on the bed and pick up some socks and soft thin interior shoes for the rest of the night, Lucas hurried as much as his aching legs and cane allowed to get back to the small bench besides the suite's door to finish preparing for the delivery. At about fifty minutes from the moment he ordered, the door chime rang and a young male voice spread through the suite by the intercom speakers. "Hello; room service for #204 from the restaurant. I have your meal, sir."

Standing up while leaning on the weaponized cane for support, Lucas looked at the security monitor mounted to the inside of the door itself; he could see the young adult with white skin, brown hair, green eyes and the hotel uniform pushing a service cart with a covered tray. Satisfied the man was alone in the corridor, he rang the bell to automatically open the door while walking away from the portal a bit, just to have some distance in case... Well, in case of anything, really. With his mobility limited and his reflexes dulled by the pills he had taken all afternoon and evening coupled to the
fatigue that was becoming felt, the youth couldn't take chances with anything or person that walked into the suite.

Grasping firmly the steel pommel of the cane with both hands, the juvenile businessman affected an air of studious disinterest as the valet rolled the cart into the suite straight to the dining room table where he set the warm tray then the smaller covered bowl with the cold dessert. "Will that be all sir? Do you want me to open a bottle of wine or beer for you to accompany the meal?" the server asked politely, ready to complete the service at the table as was standard in such high class establishments when you ordered something in-house.

Shaking his head negatively from his position by the bank of wall mounted ovens in the kitchen, the teenager signaled he would finish the rest himself if he needed more. Nodding with a smile, the young valet took a strip of paper from his vest pocket and looked it over before placing it on top of the meal tray's cover. It was the printed invoice for the food, delivery and tip, all included and paid by credit card on the moment of ordering so the man had nothing else to do in the room but salute the client and leave the suite. Following the man with his eyes while wearing a placid, fake smile reserved for such mundane situations, the teenager went to insure the entry door was locked and secured for the night before slowly walking on painfully cramped legs to sit for his meal.

He did quick work of the pea soup, realizing after only two spoons just how hungry and tired he was. Despite all his best efforts, he still had not managed to find a way to survive on coffee and teen stubbornness alone. - Snort! - Any plans for an evening shower were forgotten as he figured he had enough energy to eat the entire meal and trudge to bed, if only barely awake along the way. The warmth of the soup and buttered bread roll did wake him a bit but the weight of the warm chewy meat settled heavily in the pit of his gut, giving him a satisfying sensation that initiated drowsiness and made his eyes droop. Plowing mechanically through the excellently cooked food with more teenaged stubbornness than real appetite anymore, the young man forced himself to finish everything, including the cake and last drops of coffee in the mug.

After piling everything in the tray, he hobbled with the lot in hand on unsteady legs over to the kitchen counter next to the sinks where he laid out the tray and soiled dishes for house keeping to pick up when they passed their rounds. Without any other sorts of preparations, he shut the ceiling lights across the entire suite then padded to the bedroom, intent on reaching the actual bed before the large couch in the living area called out to him. Having a nap on the wide sectional besides the huge fireplace seemed sooo comfortable... No! He had a bed waiting for him, just a few feet to the left... He could nap in the living room another day when everything was setup and running.

Finally seated on the bed, he took off his sneakers, socks, shirt and jeans with everything that had filled his pockets or traveler's belt going into the locking drawer of the nightstand. Stripped down to his ordinary square-cut black boxers, the boy pulled the sheets back just enough to slide underneath and pulled them back up to his neck, his thin meatless body having gotten chilled by the short amount of time he spent undressed. In the deep nighttime darkness of the bedroom, the warm reddish light emanating gently from the cast iron insert in the fireplace in front of the bed made a pleasant atmosphere conducive to peace of mind and sleep. Soon, the teenager was sound asleep, the day's travels, weariness and work having finally taken their toll on him. He would wake up fully refreshed in the morning early enough for a long hot bath, breakfast and the meeting with his new lawyers.

**Wrath**

*(Lord of the Rings – Uruk-Hai war march)*

West Africa; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 10:06am

West America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 00:06am (midnight)
An angry burst of swears accompanied the sound of breaking glass as Lawrence reamed out the 'child runaway & delinquent recovery expert' on the vidphone on his desk. The uppity mongrel was a damned low-born mercenary just like all the others, and it didn't count for fuckshit in Lawrence's books that the man didn't have the balls to look at his own perverse evil in the face. If the weakling coward insisted on being called facetious titles and water-down his job description so he could walk in public without having the cops after his lying hide, then he could do it on his own clock, without Lawrence there to endure the displays of cowardice and spinelessness.

The felonious technician yelled at the vidphone's image "I want MEN to do this job, not goddamned male versions of Mary Poppins! He deserves a beat down by armed cops, not aanny with a pacifier! Get some real men with real guns and BREAK the defective little retard so he knows his MASTER once and for all! I have A DEAL with your bishop over at the cathedral that you will do this in exchange for money and services provided to the Church so their missionary works can spread. Do YOU want to inform the 'Honorable Faithful Lord Bishop' that his plans and lofty ambitions are stalled because I refuse to pay for YOUR subpar counter-performances?"

The man on the other end of the comms sighed in despondent contempt for the piece of human crap that had called him after referral by the Church of Jesus the Redeemer of Blighted Souls in Tempa, Florida, USA. Him and his team of ex soldiers & cops had been doing jobs for the HFL Bishop Brady Khunestade and the church's juvenile reform boot camp, but never of this sort before. This was a clear plan for destroying the body and soul of a child by his father for no reason other than the parent was an utter bastard, and a cowardly, menial one at that. Still, the damned bishop owned their balls with the blackmail material he had on each member of the team so they had little choice in the matter. The kid would have to watch out for himself, if he could.

Putting on the most insincere expression he knew how to make, the mercenary responded glibly: "Don't worry your purrty widdle head, old bean... We'll find the kid in whatever hole he's dug himself. Then the guys will show him the better value of docility and submission to your will. If he gets broken bones and scars along the job, this fault for not obeying in the first place." He finished with a patently fake wan smile aimed at Lawrence that the engineer was just too angry, or dense, to see through.

"Fine. Get it done and send me the films and physical proofs of completion. If I LIKE the results, I might send your team a bonus directly. If not, I have a trip to NCQ in 22 days; I would have to make a detour by Tempa to speak with HFL Bishop Khunestade about the lack of faith, belief and undiscipline of his followers in his Great Crusade of the Pure Americans. Understood?" Lawrence commanded imperiously at the man who could no doubt kill him with bare hands if he wanted to but was too cowardly to go against his ecclesiastic overlord to be any threat.

Not waiting for any answers, the criminal father closed the comms and leaned back in his plush, genuine stallion leather chair. He began to rock back and forth gently as he imagined the look of fear and panic on the face of the ill-aborted little piss-stain of a procreate that served him for a son.

It would be glorious for HIM, the powerful adult, for a change in this damned life.

The tremors of fear that wracked his left arm in time to the minuscule palpitation in his thorax was ignored and not even perceived. Otherwise, Lawrence would have to admit that the events of 2 years back had scared, and scarred, him much more than he was willing to admit, especially to his own self.
The beating may have almost handicapped Lucas, but the child's defense and retaliation had almost killed Lawrence, coming close to destroying his eyes, nose, mouth and one ear on the left side. The millions of credits he had to swindle out of WPP's accounts to pay for reconstructive surgeries followed by more plastic interventions didn't bear thinking about. Ever.

After that wet-dream of parental domination was finished and done with, he would simply have to make a minor side deal with Will Noyce to make suffer that cowardly cur lieutenant Denalt. Ruining the traitor's undeserved career for daring to deny Lawrence his due respect and obedience should be enough vengeance for that case.

{ SQ } - { PREVIEW ch.4 } - { SQ }

Setting up the defensive paranoid reality and illnesses that Lucas lives with every day. A lot of new formidable weaponry and gear comes into play, the teenager's phantom bot-net gets organized for defense and the companies start proving their uses.

Lucas dives in the Web's darker areas to evaluate an incoming threat he was warned about.

The canadian lawyers come on the gameboard. Lucas' entire 16 years of misery, pain and shame are revealed to light. The lengthy expose of his academics, diplomas and iconic creations is given, and several details of his misbegotten ancestry come to light with even more wealth, power and threats.

The depravity of Cynthia and Lawrence is exposed in crude details, as are their methods and allies.

CNN carries the story of the teenager's attempted enslavement with many experts to back it up. The DXS (Department of External Services) with MacGyver's crew comes into the story by the side-door, as do NCIS and the FBI. The other agencies concerning law-enforcement and counter-terrorism are not far behind them.
The first day of the rest of my life

The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } - { WARNING } - { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

FOURTH CHAPTER; The first day of the rest of my life

The morning after

(The Hobbit – Smaug awaking under the dwarven hoard)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 07:00am

Dalemington Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada
Dring! Dring! Driiiing! - Groooaaarrrr! - and Smack!

The bed sheets lifted a small bit near the pillows on the left side of the bed near the entry of the bedroom as the clearly angry teenager's blond mop of hair slowly emerged menacingly from under his protective hillock of textiles. In case it hadn't been made clear before, Lucas was most definitely NOT a morning person.

Glaring malevolently at the small brass travel alarm clock that was now clicking away peacefully, the boy muttered unholy imprecations about clock-makers and an international conspiracy to deprive adolescent males of their much needed beauty sleep. Squinted eyes turned to the large accordion doors leading to the patio, trying to find if there was any light coming around the thick curtains. Seeing a few miserable sun rays, Lucas grumbled further about needing sleep and debated with himself the necessity of getting up to prepare the day versus the comfort of his warm bed.

Sigh! - Giving it up for a bad job done, the youth yawned widely until he felt his jaw strain painfully as he scratched a few itches around his stiff legs and torso. Wrapping the multiple layers of blankets around his thin meatless frame, he sat in the bed, leaning backwards against the headboard as he gazed meditatively into the embers of the fireplace set directly into the far wall in front of the bed. After a few minutes of calm thought to gather his fragmented mind back into working order, he shook off the blankets and carefully set his feet on the carpeted floor to test the strength and stability of his lower limbs. The cold climate and different barometric pressure were not doing him any favors to date.

Now standing, the boy took the time to give the bedroom a more thorough look-over than yesterday when he did a quick tour of the place with the manager in tow. In order to maximize heat distribution, the fireplace was in the wall across from the entry door. The bed was set on the right of the entry door with the wide patio doors over from that. On the left of the entry were a set of built-in closets and open fronted wall units to hold decorative pieces or souvenirs the tourists bought. On each side of the stone hearth were solid pine wood lower cabinets that served as counters to hold the small 4-cup coffee maker, condiments and sundries. The personal mini-fridge was under the counter near the closets. A massive Internex enabled screen, 3 feet high by 6 feet wide, hung directly over the chimney's mantel. All in all, it was a very well appointed bedroom for a hotel claiming 4+ stars accommodations & services.

Since he was only wearing his ordinary black boxers from yesterday, he could clearly see the surgical scars running along the length of both legs' outer sides and the battle damage spread haphazardly about his entire person. During their last fight, Lawrence had hit him many times hard enough to commit compounded fractures that left one femur broken with many dangerous fragments digging around the flesh that needed removing and replacing. Likewise, he could pass a hand over his bare chest and feel the raised ridges of the scars from being whipped all over with an electrical cord his father had ripped off the small coffee table lamp to beat him with, after tearing his shirt off during the scuffle when he knocked the teen to the ground to kick his contempt into him. That was when Lucas had sprayed him with acid in the face in his attempt to repel the clearly lethal attack that damaged his legs and thorax. Not that it spared Lawrence further grief since Lucas was also well and truly pissed-off by that point; first getting sexually assaulted then his own parent comes in to pile shit on top of things? No, the teenager had not reacted well nor with any restraint at that turn of event.

No pity for Lawwy; the bastard could suffer just like he had inflicted on him.

Screwing his eyes tightly shut to avoid yet another episode of crying like a girl PMS'ing, the forlorn adolescent took a steadying breath, grabbed hold of the pommel of his cane and lifted himself off the bed to start his day. Come good or ill, he had to move, live and prepare; nobody else would do that for him and he wasn't ready just yet to lay down and give up trying. Walking out of the bedroom on
shaking legs, he leaned on his weaponized cane with his right hand, using his left hand to lean on furniture and walls to hold himself vertical. Thusly he made his way to the kitchen to activate the automated drinks brewer for his first coffee of the day. Equipped with a small espresso heavy on brown sugar and cream, he began to reach the second level of wakefulness sufficiently enough to start planning his tasks.

Grabbing a small oat muffin from the large fridge, he munched thoughtfully as he ordered his mind, dragging items from the depths of his vast memory to place them on a virtual whiteboard centered before his mind’s eye. As the organigram for the day and tomorrow developed, the teen sat at the wood and glass dining table next to the huge principal fireplace. Gazing into the reddish depths, he decided to open the cast iron & glass doors to put in a pair of logs from the wood reserve on the wall on the right-side of the chimney. After the small effort of movement had been done, he was back to his chair, turned completely so he could lean back into the backrest whilst looking into the merrily dancing flames. After finishing his miniature breakfast, he had a clear plan in mind for the day to come so he closed tight the stove doors and took up his cane.

Standing up on much more solid legs now that blood flow was strong again, he walked towards the bathroom to use the toilet and get himself a cleansing hot shower followed by a long therapeutic soak in the warm jetted tub. Inside the washing section of the room he turned the taps on the large tub to start the fill-up and set the vintage wall-inset brass analog clock to sound an alarm at 08:30am to get him out of the water. He then started the shower and went to use the toilet cubicle while the two waterworks got up to speed and proper temperature. After relieving himself from the night's burdens, he walked back to the vanity area to grab the towels and small toiletry kit he had placed there last evening after arriving. His shower was quick and brisk, lasting only long enough to clear off the night's sweat and the grime gathered from traveling two solid days in public transports. The tub would take care of giving the warmth he really wanted as well as massaging and loosening his meager muscles with the jetted flows.

Specifically as Lucas had asked when choosing his suite, the shower stall was big enough that a large wheelchair could roll right into it. There was an electrical lift system built into the ceiling to help transfer handicapped patients from the conveyance to the enameled steel table that folded out of the wall to allow easier cleansing of the ailing person. The lift system was installed in such way that it could go into the shower stall, over the large tub or into the enclosed toilet stall without any issues. Since it had been rated up to 1,000 pounds of dead weight, the meager, meatless teenager didn't think he would break it if he ever needed to use it for himself following his medical treatments.

As was proper of most hotels, there were electronics built into the washing area of the bathroom. There were built-in units for an old vintage analog radio and modern Internex enabled screen in each segment of the bathroom to permit easy monitoring of the suite, watching a movie or taking a call in the tub or in the 'second office' as the toilet was often referred to. You could allow entry to the room service valets from the shower or order in new clothes as you primped in front of the vanity. Again, well made and thought for the 4+ stars level of service advertised.

After showering, Lucas slid into the warm pulsating waters of the large podium mounted tub, sighing in body-wide relief as the water's currents soothed his damaged skin. Eyes squinted in relaxation, he noticed that there was some sort of brass railing on each side of the wide, long tub to move a heavy wheeled table that was set across the basin. This serving tray was already loaded with a small brass framed mirror to look into while washing and treating his face plus a small wicker basket filled with different perfumed soaps, oils and bath salts. Next to this was a pile of washcloths, a large white enameled brass bowl with a cover. Amusingly, the remote control for the tub's electronics like the jets, temperature, diverse lights inside and around, and the web monitor was built into the top of the moving rail-tray. It was covered by an integral clear plastic layer to waterproof it while allowing the internally lit buttons to be visible in all lighting conditions.
Lucas smiled as he saw that the remote had a blue button with a logo he recognized easily; Amazon Alexa voice command modules & Insteon domotics devices all over the suite. Probably all over the hotel, too. He hadn't seen the Alexa beacon or peripherals yesterday evening because he honestly hadn't been looking for them nor expecting the system. The hotel website hadn't said anything about having fully wired smart devices in the rooms or public areas. That was easy to handle; the Cyberghast Hub was designed to detect, map and control several hundred different commercially available CPU types, operating systems and mobile devices through adapter-apps or command-virus hijacks.

Now ensconced for a relaxing, healing sojourn in the warm water to which he added therapeutic bath salts, the adolescent activated the wall-mounted screen to see what the local breakfast hour news around Vancouver were like. There was a small segment about the state of traffic for rush hour, including videos from circulation cameras in well traveled business and touristic areas of town. The morning view of the Lions Gate Bridge with the vast blue waters of Vancouver Harbour in the background was astounding. After traffic there were a few segments about police investigations in progress due to street gang activity, a portrait of a local catering business that was doubling its size thus hiring 20 new employees, and the almost mandatory skit about the holidays and family traditions associated with Christmas and gift shopping.

Lucas switched channels over to CNN to see on the international front if anything worth mentioning was happening. Blergh! - Weather! There was a storm front climbing up the eastern seaboard of the USA that was presently pummeling the shores of New Jersey and almost inside New York State already; predictions had it sprawling all the way up to Maine by the 25th of December, putting several million people at risk of power outages and being isolated in the depths of winter. Besides that, there were the usual deblatarations about what US president Trump tweeted over night, the Nth attempt to resurrect the moribund NAFTA agreements, and yet another intercontinental missile test by The Montagnard Federation. In other words, everybody in North America and Europe was taking things easy for the coming holidays, except those struck by the crazy weather in some parts of the world.

Lucas switched channels again, finding the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and its equivalent to the CNN all-day newscast. The show 'Money, Power & Politics' was presently hosting a group of pundits who were debating the pros & cons of ending NAFTA negotiations with the newly re-elected unstable US president to switch over for free-trade accords with Great Britain that had its wish granted when the European Confederation was rebuilt without them in it. The experts were explaining that Canada, being an old British colony, could use grand-fathered laws and codes of the Old British Empire Commonwealth to lay its claims and establish a solid, favorable position during the talks. The teen thought they had a good idea; but then again, he thought anything that dumped Trump to the curb like trash was a good idea for everybody's health and sanity.

{ SQ } - { Gearing up } - { SQ }

(MacGyver – original theme 1985)

(West America 08:50am)

After spending almost an hour in the tub until his skin had begun pruning, the teenager got out and dried himself slowly with a warm fluffy towel. Having that heating rack to keep the linens warm nicely positioned between the tub and shower was the type of idea to keep in mind when redesigning his multiple secretly owned homes later on. Covered only in a thick brown terrycloth bathrobe tagged with the Daleminton logo, the boy took his weaponized cane and walked back to the master bedroom, testing both legs along the way to make certain they would be reliable for the day.
This situation was really aggravating the teen despite all the luxury surrounding him. Back in San Francisco, his office was only about half the size of the suite he was renting so he didn't need the damned cane to walk around his own domain; leaning on furniture and door frames was enough to stay autonomous. But here, if things got worse, he would need to change residence quickly to have a live-in orderly to help him or else face the reality of living in a hospital for months AGAIN despite all the medical care he had already received.

Annoyed at his own weakness, the adolescent decided that thinking about his lawyers and the coming meeting was a better use of his faculties than worrying about his lackluster health. After pulling stuff out of his heavy wheeled trunk, he got dressed in comfortable four-seasons clothing selected to be easy to take off when the hirelings would want to verify what exactly his health situation was. He chose matching dark blue boxers, socks and customized long-sleeved turtleneck shirt that had two chest pockets along some semi-fit deep purple jeans and soft sneakers. Searching through his carry-on bag, he took out a specially made brown leather belt conceived with three snap-lock loops on each side to hang tools for jobs or in this case, place his cane on the right hip like a sword so he could use both hands freely without abandoning the defensive mobility-insuring tool.

With the clothes in place, Lucas began the laborious process of putting on the electronic equipment and survival tools he usually carried everywhere but in bed. He began by setting his custom-built digital recorder in the zippered pocket hidden in the lower rear rim of his turtleneck shirt then wired it to the pinhead camera hidden in the lower rear rim of his turtleneck shirt then wired it to the pinhead camera hidden in the shirt collar's front.

Opening his heavy wheeled trunk, he took out a small thermoplastic case with a fingerprint lock; inside was a pair of meta-data glasses. The glasses were composed of 4 lenses and articulated frame that protected his eyes from the front and sides while he worked on chemicals, welds, or just when he had to leave the safety of his office or apartment. This was a device that Lucas had crafted himself out of safety eyeglasses usually worn in medical laboratories or pharmacy classes to which he had added mini-LED lights, pinhead cameras,, microphones, mini-earphones and transparent display system that made the lenses into small monitors. The device could link wirelessly to any other device he had programmed with the synchronization application or by wire to the same recorder as the safety camera in his shirt collar. The data displayed by the lenses helped to view critical information during a demanding meeting with an ornery client without opening his phone or laptop, or even plan body movements when crafting or fighting. Since he didn't have any sorts of training in how to fight anything, he needed each and every advantage he could create for himself.

The teenager had kept the unique exemplar of the meta-glasses that he presently had on hand in his trunk for the trip to avoid losing them to a long-fingered border guard that may be tempted to use the old "you stole them so I'm confiscating them to find their owner and send them back" when in fact the grabby bastard would keep them for himself or as gift for a friend. Lucas wasn't born yesterday and had encountered his share of crooked security people in his life; he would not easily fall for that trick. Putting the glasses on his face, he wired them to the recorder module in the shirt's hidden rear pocket before dropping the large smartphone into the left breast pocket of the shirt.

In the right side pocket of his shirt he set a titanium alloy tactical pen that held cartridges of opaque fluorescent inks in white, green, yellow, red, blue and tar black. Then a titanium alloy wide handled penknife with multiple blades stored in the rubber coated shaft. Followed a custom designed pyro-engraving & electro-reaction pen. Finally, the boy added his very useful (and dangerous) acid etching fountain pen that he used to mark or disable circuitry as well as self-defense.

Next Lucas put on a pair of synthetic canvas bracers on each wrist; these each held a small 3 inch straight-bladed knife, two cylinders of paralytic gas and two cylinders of acid. The metal cylinders were about 3 inches long by ¼ inch wide and could be used with the integrated timer or directly with the pressure nozzle built into each device. Taking six more units of paralytic and twelve more of
acid, he placed them into the small slots crafted into the thickness of his tool-belt to hold the munitions at hand. This was followed by stuffing the pockets of his jeans with a card wallet in his rear-left, a billfold in the rear-right, a small plastic rectangular coin box in the front-left and spiked keychain in the front-right. A specific sheath on the right hip of his belt received a large custom-built multi-tool while another sheath on the left hip held a 'First-Responder' special edition Swiss army knife designed for paramedics.

As a last detail, he added around his waist the other customized leather belt that held his multi-pouch ultra-compact field med-kit with all the pills, tools and bandages he needed to fight off infections, cramps and other effects from the beating two years ago.

He wasn't overreacting, nor was he paranoid; his parents really were out to get him.

With all his pockets filled, wrists loaded and systems fully in place and online, the teenager walked out to the kitchen to get a small something to eat so he didn't get a headache from lack of food as often happened to him when he forgot to look at the clock during important work. A short while later saw him equipped with an oversized mochaccino in his personal steel thermal mug, as he waited for his pair of toast to finish baking inside the wall-inset toaster oven so he could have a minimal amount of fuel to run on until the lawyers arrived and they shared a call-in power brunch. Once his small breakfast was buttered and placed on top of his closed portable workstation next to the coffee mug, he grabbed the laptop as if it were a serving tray to relocate to the Cyberghast Hub to peruse the night's work.

After opening the complex electronic lock on the sliding doors, Lucas entered the dedicated work space and shut the doors behind him, going so far as to lock them again. After setting his burden on the low counter besides the inert cold fireplace, he tapped the touchscreen to wake up the system so it could process its report sequence while he pulled a traditionally crafted wooden wheeled director's chair out of the closet where the work crew had stashed it per his request. The massive piece of furniture was luxurious like the suite and came equipped with built-in adjustable cushioned seat and panels for the back & head, arms and legs that could also heat or cool by 25 degrees Celsius or massage the
sitter. Small speakers and dirigible LED’s were set into the flexible flaps on each side of the headrest
to make for a more agreeable reading time or ease stress while working late at night. All the
magnificent chair needed to work was a standard 110 volt cord and a WiFi router nearby although
Lucas had actually connected it physically to one of the many spare standard RJ45 Internex cable
ports on his tech hub.

As the Cyberghast whined and grumbled to life, the teenager held a piece of toast between his teeth
as he typed access codes and file paths one-handed since the left hand had the mug of coffee ready to
dispense its life-bearing liquid on request. Munching through his toast instinctively like a ruminating
cow, he swallowed the last chunk with a gulp of exquisite mochaccino as his communications
management suite ran down the list of what he had received during his sleep. A quick look
confirmed that the multiple devices about his person had run their synchronization routines and were
now fully updated for the coming day.

As it had been discovered this morning, he activated the Cyberghast network mapping and command
apps to discover all the domotics in the hotel complex and usurp control into his eagerly awaiting
invisible hands. Finally, in his active alerts panel, he saw that the little minion in Houston still hadn't
been arrested or even discovered yet, but it was just a question of time; he would know when it
happened since he had bugged the local police stations, DCFS and set a media-mining app for just
this.

Sitting comfortably, the boy tapped a few app shortcuts on his touchscreen to activate the reports for
the permanent queries that were programmed to overwatch his parents and all of their
communications with anybody. This was to find out directly from the sources what they were trying
to do with his life and health, especially Lawrence. Besides, hacking their CPU's or wiretapping their
comms was so damned easy it was almost shameful; one was a criminalist with active court cases
and the other was the director of a 'secured' facility under 'military control' so neither of them should
be this undefended or unprepared against cybernetic attacks.

\{ SQ } - \{ Cult of fools \} - \{ SQ \}

(West America 09:12)

Since Cynthia was well and truly shot of his life, she never had anything in the works concerning
him or his many businesses. She might have been tempted to try something to get his money but the
last threats he made against her at age 10 had her weary he could hack her servers then sell her
customer's private information on the dark web. That left Lawrence as the only real active threat and
it only took five minutes for Lucas to find out what his father had set in motion. The teenager sat
back quietly in his deeply cushioned chair as he watched the recording of his father speaking firstly
with some elderly skin-head neo-nazi bastard in Tampa in Florida who happened to be a priest. The
film was recorded in the early hours of Friday morning, hour of Cape Town, South Africa, so almost
10 hours ahead of presently.

(Carl Orff – O Fortuna, Imperatrix Mundi)

This tattooed bastard was called Brady Khunestade and went by the self-styled exaltation of
'Honorable Faithful Lord Bishop' inside a church that sounded more like a doomsday cult than
anything else. This weird group, the Church of Jesus the Redeemer of Blighted Souls, was located
physically on the shores of Mckay Bay on the tip of 34th Street South in an area devoid of buildings
or tourists. It's web site showed a walled complex surrounded by cheap corrugated steel sheets held
upright by I-beams set on the internal side of the domain. Everything else inside the estate was built
out of cheap molded concrete to look like an abbey out of the German Renaissance. They were
basically tall airy edifices with thin tall stained glass windows, wrap-around balconies at all levels
and gabled roofs with religious statuary instead of the finials normally used in the area. The 
compound held a huge cruciform church for 2,000 seated worshippers plus another 1,000 standing 
attendees, adult dorms, children's dorms with boys and girls split between two different buildings and 
a medium sized apartment tower, thirteen storeys high with 16 units per floor, reserved for the family 
and servants of what could only be called 'ruling family'. In the back of the compound were a few 
barns to hold small livestock, mostly goats, sheep, pigs, chickens and turkeys. It was written on the 
website that the cult kept a quad of mules as they had been mentioned in the bible as 'the common 
man's conveyance' versus horses which were almost exclusively for the military at the time. It was 
shown they had a full automotive garage, a full-service workshop for their tools and materials to 
maintain the estate and they bragged about having reinforced 'storm shelters' beneath each building in 
the compound to tough out the "coming dark, stormy, times" as 'revealed' in the Biblical Scriptures. 

Lucas snorted nastily as he read that; it clearly meant they had armored bunkers under their estate to 
resist intervention by police, the FBI or even the army as that was the typical thoughts of cultists. In 
sectarian code-speak "dark storms" really meant that the government would come in to liberate the 
victims of the ecclesiastes while reconnecting them to material reality. As all religions said they were 
'The Light of Goodness' and everybody outside their walls were 'Darkness Inspired' or 'Incarnations 
of Evil' it didn't take his 3 doctorates to understand their patently transparent code and its reactionary, 
rebellion-slash-civil uprising themes. Even a soccer mom or the average high school kid could see 
through the crapulence's thin cladding of prophetic claptrap.

Everything inside the cult was based upon the written deblaterations of a distant past clanhead who 
founded the church which was then transmitted by inheritance as if it were a regular business or 
ordinary farmstead. A bit like what happened to the Mormons and Scientology. It was presently 
rulled in the following order with appended titles:

*) The 88 year old 'Righteously Honored Faithful Cardinal' Harkady Munroe Khunestade. His 
brothers were 'Honorable Faithful Lord Bishop' and his cousins were 'Reverend Faithful Abbot'; the 
men who married his sisters were called 'Reverend Faithful Patriarch' while the husbands of his 
female cousins were 'Reverend Faithful Elder'.

*) The 62 year old son of the cardinal Brady Derues Khunestade was exalted as the only 'Honorable 
Faithful Lord Bishop' of his generation. His brothers were 'Reverend Faithful Abbot' and his cousins 
were 'Reverend Faithful Patriarch'; the husbands of the sisters were 'Reverend Faithful Elder' while 
the men married to the female cousins were 'Faithful Apostollate'.

*) The 41 year old grandson Brock Hampton Khunestade was exalted as the only 'Reverend Faithful 
Abbot' of his generation. His brothers were 'Reverend Faithful Patriarch' and his cousins were 
'Reverend Faithful Elder'; the men who married his sisters were called 'Faithful Apostollate' while the 
husbands of his female cousins were 'Faithful Creed Speachers'

*) Finally, the 19 year old great-grand-son Ahbramas Gelad Khunestade was exalted as the only 
'Reverend Faithful Patriarch' of his generation which also happened to be the lowest and youngest 
position to sit on the Abbatial Council that governs the cult. His brothers were 'Reverend Faithful 
Elder' and his cousins were 'Faithful Apostollate'; the husbands of the sisters were 'Faithful Creed 
Speachers' while the men married to the female cousins were simply 'Faithful Armsmen'.

It was patently obvious that women had no ordained positions nor any decisional capacity inside the 
cult structure and management. While women did a lot of work, mostly in manual labor like 
cleaning, cooking and tending the animals or herb gardens, all 'technical' jobs like accounting, 
management, automotive or building mechanics and modern electronic communications were all 
segregated to men. Young children were indoctrinated from birth into knowing and accepting the 
'traditional' gender-based roles and jobs under threats of dire, cruel physical punishments meted out
in public on the church's plaza at noon. It was even said so openly on the website; the cult refused and reviled so-called 'human rights' as an "affront to God and God-Given Law / Authority to manage church affairs internally" so they willfully ignored them and all court rulings to that effect.

Torturing people, especially children, was Biblical; PERIOD.

Furthermore, it was also blindingly obvious from the pictures on the website that the entire church-group was composed exclusively of racially selected caucasian/northman white persons. There was a clear presence of nazi iconography in the sculptures and bas-reliefs all around the compound and every member of the church had several tattoos branding them in stark black and red with swastikas, swords, black sun wheels and celtic crucifixes of all sorts. All men wore completely shaven heads except for those in the direct line of heredity to the cardinal's throne. These men blood-related to the top-man wore complicated germanic or celtic style beards that were braided with small gems twined into the hairs. Women had hair no longer than the lower part of the shoulder blades that was also braided in germanic styles but sporting ornaments made only of wood or animal bone. All metals, jewels and precious artwork was reserved strictly for the men who were acknowledged as potential inheritors of the cardinal at his death.

{ SQ } - { Unholy Priests } - { SQ }

(Two Steps From Hell – The strength of a thousand men)

Lucas created queries and automated searches about the church and its activities. Since it had been founded in the early 1800's by the direct ancestors of the cardinal and had always been under the control of Khunestade named men, finding paperwork trails and court cases would be easy. Dealing with the overflow of 200 years of such, much less practical. Unfortunately, since Lawrence hired a bunch of skinheads who report back directly to the highest echelons of the church in question, the adolescent was left with the obligation of finding and processing absolutely every piece of crap that could be found and acquired about the group of depraved, sectarian madmen.

Thankfully, a lot of the work had already been done over the decades by the US Department of Justice and its many law enforcement agencies, neither of which were shy about sharing information concerning doomsday cults and nihilistic sects. Also, the ever present SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center) had a trove of data on hate groups like this one and the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) also tracked their heinous anti-law/anti-society preaching when they lobbied local and state governments to back-off their church doctrines and activities. Every official government source to date, be it local, state or federal, said clearly that these people were a typical heavily armed but poorly trained militia of racist religion-empowered fanatics.

Why had they never been arrested or at least stopped from stockpiling weapons?

Because they had a 200 year old history of southernism, bigotry and anti-human predications that had been either ignored or smiled at by every government in Florida since their creation in the early 1800's by extremists who would later become secessionists to fight the 'impure' northerners. Over twenty decades they systematically amassed a hoard of cash produced by criminal activities that they then spread around to grease all the politos in sight to make them approve publicly of laws and measures limiting the rights of government agencies to intervene in church activities or religious edifices.

Faith, religion and religious organizations; the trinary poison that was destroying Humanity.

On a sideways-related note, the mercenaries that Lawrence ordered to attack Lucas were "affiliated to the cult" but didn't actually live or operate from the main compound. Each man was a self-contained autonomous contractor with his own building to operate from and they united only as
many men as the job required to be carried out successfully. In this case, they planned to have four heavily armed men with a big SUV-type truck and a 40 foot contractor's trailer split in two segments: the prison cage and the dormitory-slash-armory.

The communications that Lucas managed to hack between the criminalized ex-cops and the main church compound explained their plan simply enough. They would drive the several thousand miles up north to British Columbia so as to pass the Canadian borderline at an area that was not guarded during the night. That way, they could illegally smuggle in all the sedatives, guns and munitions they wanted. Once the child was captured, they would hole up in a rural forested zone near a touristic village for a week to break the boy properly before heading back south by different roads than they used going up to avoid detection of their movements. Once in the USA they would hit the interstate highways and head for the church's juvenile reform boot camp, located in the swampy bowels of the Everglades since under USA laws what they did was 'almost legal' as long as Lawrence did in fact sign the damnable documents to have a 'schooling, spiritual discipline & reformation' contract with the church of depraved subhumans to show the cops. Most police officers doing traffic stops would rarely bother asking questions beyond seeing the forms and even fewer bothered to use the web to find information about the so-called church-school or boot-camp reformatory unless they knew they were being actively monitored by some social watchdog group.

If all went well for the mercenaries' planned mission, the 16 year old boy would be enslaved, broken and docile for the rest of his life in 2 weeks flat and Lawrence would then be able to visit Florida on his regularly scheduled trip while including a side-trip from NC to the cult's prison camp to see by himself the remains of his son's destroyed bodily form. The fact that his father had specifically asked the mercs to gang-rape then permanently handicap Lucas by damaging his legs beyond all repair sent a dual shiver of fear and raw rage racing down the teen's spine. These depraved 'soldiers of the faithful crusade' would be made to suffer and the clergy that sent them would endure and suffer even worse before they were allowed to die slowly in rotting diseased pieces.

{ SQ } - { Push-button warfare } - { SQ }

(The Rolling Stones – Paint It Black)

Lucas was not a merciful opponent, nor was he particularly squeamish about wetworks anymore as could be attested by several police reports in Stanford, Silicon Valley, San Francisco and even Buffalo at that. Pity the poor fools that would learn this soon. The skinny, unhealthy teenager had already injured, maimed, handicapped and killed several times in his short, young life and would keep on going until his miserable end found him at last. Cracking the joints of his thin fragile fingers, the blue-eyed wunderkind analyzed the flows and ebbs of the data streaming before his gaze. There, waiting to be discovered and exploited, were the personal, strike-team and church-wide patterns of behavior that he needed to find and utilize against the people planning to kidnap, demean, break and destroy him.

It was incredible just how piss-poor at 'operational security' these mongrels really were; it explained why the US Army had kicked them out after court-martialling them for selling secrets or blabbing drunkenly in a bar before a 'top secret' mission going live. Several of the church-group's mercenaries were barely passed boot camp while the rest were washed out from the lowest ranks after being caught doing nasty things in retaliation for being refused promotions or transfer to elite units like the SEAL's or Delta Force. Each and every last one of those losers had spent time in Fort Leavenworth before being handed a one-way ticket out of the service by the backdoor straight into the dumpster next to it.

Lucas could work with that.
All of these guys had three things in common that would help destroy them quickly before they even reached him, with a little unhelpful attention from his on people and tools.

1) They had no tech savvy beyond maps, guns and car engines.

2) They all had the emotional instability of a rabid dog overdosed on steroids & meth.

3) Their teamwork was like gasoline & lit matches; volatile and incendiary.

The psychological profiles the data streams revealed were full of holes, instabilities and severely lacking in basic social skills including very poor impulse control and heightened aggressivity. None of that made the kind of people for whom stealth-centric missions would work well. Also, time was clearly not on their side; place 4 of these mercs inside a pressure cooker for a week and you would have an explosion that would leave one to four of them lying dead on a back-country road. If they were forced to drive in a small pickup truck from Tampa, Florida to the Canadian border for 1,400 miles then some 3,000 miles more towards Vancouver, BC... All in enclosed confines, tightly packed like rotten sardines in a hot tin can, then add the winter weather, several feet of snow on the ground to slow traffic and everything down even more...

Yeah, these buggers had no idea what they were doing and the cultists who planned the job probably never lived in a wintry country in their lives. Lucas remembered Buffalo City in New York State when he was a kid; winters on the shores of Lake Erie were something white and cold, alright. No, the men who told the mercs what roadmap to follow, how to proceed with capture and stuff, those were the type used to being blindly obeyed through fear and pain. They never had to endure having to accept a multitude of different opinions and attitudes while tolerating not being the topmost authority. No, the higher ecclesiastes of the church had never had to submit and tolerate so they had no idea what it meant to sublimate their tempers and personalities for the 'Greater Good’ of the mission or group survival. These mercs had only the most limited ability to work together if kept in arm's length of the men riding herd on their combined tempers and that's why they were all housed separately, never sharing contracts unless the cardinal or bishop commanded it from their high thrones.

Running long range defense against these fools was gonna be way too easy.

Looking at the clock in the lower right corner of the main screen, he saw he had thirty minutes left before his appointment therefore all he could do was a quick survey of his resources and type in a few preparatory orders to his ghost network. The real heavy coding would have to wait for tonight and opening the Cyberghast's secondary module could be done sometime in the evening too.

Lucas snorted in contempt as he began the preparations for the overwatch functions that would map their travels and predictive algorithms that would foresee their activities along the road. He would wait until they had decided if they united in the USA or in Canada then begin striking out at them from the cybernetic depths of the Dark Web's deepest, darkest shadows.

Activating on the left screen a management application he had custom built, the teenager brought up the status of his phantom botnet as he had programmed it since last night to switch over from fully defensive configuration to 85% attack & 15% distant controlling of assets. He was up to 1,247,105 attack bots, 2,689 overwatch nodes, 1,230 remote management bots, 379 data-vault bots, 143 dead-drop reception bots and 128 query processing bots. He had now co-opted to his service 281 phantom Internex nodes that could broadcast messages under false identities or emulate public services to manipulate the responses of police, firefighters, ambulances and others in any given zone of North America.

By the end of the following week a similar setup would be in place, worming its way through the
systems of the European Confederation. Another week later and the African Confederation would be added to his shadowy webworks, then it would be Asia, then South America and finally the Balkanic Confederacy. The Montagnard Confederation's systems were too weirdly built and almost not compatible with anything that anybody had in hand so he would keep them for last, if it became necessary to work on producing something that could link and hack with their signals and codes.

Once the entire planet's networks were penetrated, he would finally have an all-encompassing early warning system that was reliable enough to go to sleep at night without wondering if he would wake up caged in a concentration camp run by priests and neo-nazis. Then, after the passive listening stations were online, he would establish the active overwatch systems, including wiretapping into the traffic cameras, facial recognition softwares and Internex logging & monitoring apps in the hands of the diverse government agencies. Each program or device would keep on working as they were conceived, built and configured for, but would have hidden backdoors that would allow him access and the ability to give his own jobs or query the data vaults they had accumulated in the name of 'National Security'.

And that meant that he would be made aware of menial little curs like these thugs within minutes of their getting a contract on his life and be in position to retaliate less than an hour after he got the warning. After that, it would be child's play to send messages out to law enforcement agencies about dangerous out-of-control criminals to be apprehended with extreme prejudice, block or track bank account activity, credit card purchases, and even trawl through the commercial data of retailers about their regional sales to find the emplacement of someone who only paid cash or worked through maids and errand boys. Humans were creatures of habit and only very slowly changed their needs and habits; the worse the habits, the more luxurious the needs, the longer it took to change and the bigger the track left in the financial logs.

These four suckers were a prime example of such endemic behavior that couldn't be controlled even if the men themselves had actually wanted to change anything in their lives. They didn't change anything therefore Lucas would track them by their habits until they reached a locality where the teenager would then warn the cops, the army and the local populace at large to be wary of them, worsening the level of the messages until somebody somewhere had a violent reaction that started the final cascade leading to conflagration and the mercs' deaths.

Murder by cops.

Why should a skinny, sickly sixteen year old have to do these jobs? The cops had the training, equipments and medical care after it was all said and done. Why should he bother putting his pasty hide in harm's way if others were already in place to do it as part of their jobs? No. The people who went to police or military academies and swore oaths to protect society could do it just as they had been trained and hired for it. The very best Lucas would do in terms of helping law enforcement was to find and hack the systems of criminals and cults, then hand over the results of his hacks. Anonymously.

If they didn't like his way of doing things, they could pass themselves of his help.

Enter the lawyers

(Edvard Grieg – In the Halls of the Mountain King)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 09:30am
Daleminton Hotel, room #204
Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada
Lucas was now relocated, sitting at his dining room table, a large cardboard box at his side on the table, as he used his portable workstation which he wired into the table's hub & electricity. He slowly browsed the web for manufacturers of industrial steel cabinets in the Vancouver area to handle one of his multiple rear-of-mind projects that would become contingencies in case the shit in his life didn’t come from just Lawrence. With heavy hitters like US Naval Intel or the UEO Navy in the mix, there would be bloodshed before the year was out, he was certain of it.

One of the professors at Stanford's Faculty of Neurosciences where Lucas did some of his most important R&D work had just emailed him about two men from something called 'Phoenix Foundation' that were poking around and his office manager in San Francisco had sent him an alert about the same thing. From the basic data search his security team at the central offices in Buffalo had done, that thinktank was a transparent shell to cover something more obscure. Based out of Los Angeles, this group was supposedly part of the US federal government's "scientific analysis apparatus" but Lucas had several doubts on this. One of them was that through his Dark Web delvings, he had seen several requests for information and personnel dossiers for people who work inside the Phoenix building with some heavy dollar amounts tagged on. Whatever Phoenix was, it had powerful, violent enemies that were putting forth the funds, equipments and man-hours to punch through their defenses. He had almost taken up a hacking contract for 10,000,005$ to find or create a backdoor into the think-tank's military grade servers for a group that seemed determined to obtain control of the building's domotics along the databases and communications, just to see what kind of shit would hit the fan afterwards.

The secrets revealed would have been VERY educational, indeed...

A gentle tone sounded through the suite as the Alexa voice synthesizer told him his internal entry was being solicited, dragging him from the morose depths of his plans for an invisible off-grid retreat until the bloody mess passed over him and into somebody else's backyard. A quick tap at the monitoring app showed him two men and a woman standing before his door, waiting for his response. He buzzed them in and called out for them to join him at the table directly once the door was shut securely.

The woman led the way. She was white with brown hair and green eyes, around fortyish, tall and thin with a friendly if reserved face. She was followed by an asian male, black hair and brown eyes, thirtyish, medium height with a serene, detached air about him that seemed to imply that reality and people were beneath his notice, even though he noticed everything in excruciating detail. The second man was white, blond hair with green eyes, also in his thirties, taller than the others at around 6’ 2” with a jovial, open expression and body language that belied his profession as a lawyer. All three were dressed in conservatively cut business suits in dark blue tones that complemented their hair and skin color well enough to indicate they had been counseled by fashion professionals. Only the most minimal accessories could be seen; a few rings, a gold chain and the woman wore a dove shaped broach made of of silver and pink quartz crystal.

The woman seemed to be the leader of the team as she handled the presentations and took charge from the get go. She didn't seem the least bit bothered that the teenager didn't stand up, extend a hand to shake or take off the large bluish glasses from his face. The basic life-story outline he sent them in writing a few days ago when the first contact was done showed clearly an unease at being in public and permanent low-grade fear at – unprotected – human interactions.

"Hello, Mister Wolenczak. Is it Professor or Doctor? Given your diplomas to date, your introduction file was a bit vague on certain key details." she opened with, smiling demurely as she tried to read and gauge her new client. Getting no response, she simply continued unabashed "I am Gertha Delray, attorney in immigration, naturalization and refugee status claims. I have been assigned by our firm as the head of the team for the initial proceedings until your residency status is cleared up and
permanent. This is the person the firm recommends as your personal attorney of record for pretty much all of your general needs; Ken Izu Tah, expert at corporate, commercial, contracts and importations laws. Besides him is one of our firm's criminalists, Joseph Mercy Aylmer, expert in weapons laws, police procedures and contesting abusive or overly vague search & arrest warrants.

Lucas nodded at them in turn as they were introduced. Looking at the asian man, he asked "Do you still follow the old traditions of your kin?" in Mandarin with a Britanic undertone to his accent since his teacher had been a Hong Kong expatriate. A single raised eyebrow on the man's face was the only reaction he received, not even a verbal answer, in response to his demonstration. Filing the man's lack of visible reaction for later, the younger male observed the reactions of the other two and found them also very limited. Good. If they displayed their emotional states publicly like roadside billboards, they wouldn't be of any use for him. He had specified to the firm he needed people who value self-control, restraint and public appearances as much as he did for the client-attorney relationship to work. It looked at first glance like the office had not badly chosen.

Standing up while using his left hand to hold onto the table to keep steady on his feet, Lucas extended his right hand to the woman first as team leader, then his assigned attorney and the criminalist last. Deciding to give the lawyers a few details upfront, he belatedly answered the question he had been asked in opening. "Welcome to my temporary lodgings. My actual title is Professor but it be could argued to legally be Doctor, as in 'Medical Doctor' due to complicated events I will explain later. Basically however, I have received several licenses directly emanating from my three Bachelors', four Masteries and three doctorates. I am officially certified as authorized developer of medical electronics, cybernetics, tools, programs and also chemicals and drugs in the USA. In parallel to that, I have received licenses as a 2rd grade paramedic, 1st grade urgentology nurse and hospital orderly. Additionally, there are several afferent university certifications in industrial molecular chemical engineering, molecular biochemistry, biogenics, genetics, neurochemistry and a few little thingies about psychology and psychiatry on the side. I will of course give you the full run down of my qualifications during the exposé of the Greek Tragedy that is my life."

The three lawyers nodded and took places at the dining table, the woman at the foot with the criminalist at her right and the commerce specialist at her left. Lucas sat back into his chair, watching quietly as they opened their briefcases to place laptops, paper files and diverse utensils on the table to begin the preliminary client interview. The teenager sipped some coffee from the heavy steel thermal mug in his left hand while his right hand fiddled idly with the pommel of his heavy steel cane, his apparent indolence hiding a level of alertness that told the attorneys just how little trust the boy had towards them at this point.

Once they were settled and Mister Tah had placed a wired professional digital recorder on the table to get an audio-video archive of the conversation, the adolescent exhaled loudly, preparing to speak for a prolonged period of time. This was not comfortable for him; he preferred written messages or at least the safety of speaking through Internex monitors. Direct human contact usually led to heartache and physical harm so he wasn't positively disposed towards the situation even if it happened at his behest.

"We will be receiving a serving cart with a buffet-style brunch around 11:00am that will help us make a pause to see how we are coming along and give us some fuel for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, I do anticipate this – conference – to be quite lengthy as my affairs, both personal and corporate, are not simple. Besides having two angry, violent parents intent on ruining my life, I also have a long bloody swath of secondary and tertiary adversaries that are not as 'permanently dead' as I would prefer them to be. We are going to have to find ways to legally, financially and societally 'neutralize' them for life. If it means leaving their companies, families, friends and acquaintances lying on the ground as rotting, broken, husks, then so be it."
The three lawyers kept studiously neutral body language, their faces betraying no emotion or personal opinion that could be perceived, even less interpreted. The initial confidential brief sent by the referring attorney in San Francisco severely stressed just how important self-control and business demeanor were to the young man during official contacts. Things could go sideways in a flash if they showed anything other than polite detachment or bland curiosity when guiding him to answer the questions they had in order to build and enact his legal positions versus his opponents. They had received and verified a series of police file numbers from several cities that were verified only superficially at this point but they were aware that the youth sitting before them had human blood on his hands and that steel cane was no toy or simple crutch to cope with his deficient legs, although it did fill that function too.

"If you are all in place, we could start?" Lucas asked in a drab, indolent tone that reflected nothing of what he actually felt or thought. He used that particular façade as a default mask when dealing with anything tedious, onerous or just bothersome so it was well practiced and did in fact hide all of his inner workings to those who saw it. Each lawyer gave a short verbal sign they were ready so the teenager could give them his story from the very start.

"I will skip 99% of what my grand-parents did since they are dead and therefore part of history rather than life. They had no real presence in my life then they passed just when I reached the age of 4 anyways, so they won't matter much in the big picture."

Sitting himself straight with both arms resting on top of the table, the cane leaning against his right thigh ready to grab at need, the adolescent's eyes became glassy, unfocussed as he delved deep into the furthest memories he could find. Not stuff he thought about daily, and most of which he tried to avoid if he could.

Ages passed

(Johann Sebastian Bach – Toccata & Fugue in D Minor)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 09:50am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

"I was born in Danbury, in Connecticut on December 24th of 2004. It was an accidental birth compared to how such things normally go. My mother Cynthia was bucking for a promotion at her law firm and being 8 months pregnant didn't stop her for anything. She and Lawrence were already established in Buffalo city on the shores of Lake Erie right after their marriage and that would be my official address and hometown for the first half of my life until Stanford. Anyways, dear Cynthia was 'attending the needs' of her only high-power client to date with vigor and gusto when the 77 year old had a heart attack during which he spasmed so hard that he punched her in the stomach repeatedly thus causing massive traumatic damages to her abdomen. This resulted in my surgically accomplished premature birthing by caesarean section to avoid losing my life."

"To make things clear, she had been married to Lawrence for two years and was still fucking many of her clients to fuel her rise to power and prominence without a care in the world for either her husband, their parents or her future children. She had been pregnant with differentiated twins; a boy and girl. My sister died inside the womb from the damages the dying man's fists inflicted. She was never named, never properly buried, just dumped in the hospital's incinerator like biological waste from an operation or failed experiment. Lawrence didn't even care. He hadn't wanted any children, ever, and having two at the same time was just twice the chore and hardship to slow down his career and high-rolling corporate lifestyle. His opinion about Cynthia screwing around was that 'it kept her..."
occupied and away from him', his clients and public image as well, so no damage there."

"My grand-parents were devastated for multiple reasons; socially, morally, religiously and every way you can think of. Their daughter had shamed all four of them and in the most obscenely public manner possible too. They held back from disowning her only on my account. They couldn't protect me if they cast her from the family and Lawrence had little to no interest in my welfare already. It was decided commonly by both Cynthia and Lawrence that if I was to live at all, the grand-parents would have to be the primary caregivers or else I would go to an orphanage and be dropped off as an unwanted nameless procreate of a street-slutting whore to boot. The grand-parents objected and took me into their homes and hearts. Because they were old and sickly, all four gramps shared a large spacious five bedroom apartment in the core of Buffalo. They had two live-in nurses to assist them with their daily lives when back pains, leg cramps from diabetes or the first symptoms of Alzheimer's disease were too strong to handle by themselves. It wasn't an assisted living facility though; just a very luxurious apartment complex for the very rich and famous."

"I lived a very ordinary, peaceful existence with my grand-parents for the first four years of my life until they started dying all together when I was three years old. The details are in the heritage files I sent you several days ago. In those years they had established a pair of obscenely large trust funds for my welfare, studies and seed money to start a business or buy my first house before I turned 25. These trust funds and their attached lawyers were supposed to take care of me once the gramps had died but the attorneys never spoke with me passed the last funeral. Whatever happened, it didn't cost me anything as I have had Carmello investigate & audit the two funds thoroughly and there wasn't a penny missing. Whatever caused those two lawyers to desist from their obligations towards me was paid for externally, without ever crossing my desk or that of the public curator in charge of watching over my situation."

(Opus – Life is Life)

"Now, between my birth and the age of 4, I developed physically as per normal charts, if a bit short and somewhat of a lightweight. My maternal grand-mother used to call me 'stubby mushroom' because I was thin and short along with my pasty white complexion. It was mentally that I blew through every expectation usually put on a baby boy of that age. Given I was traumatically premature by five weeks, the doctors and education specialists had all pretty much bet I would be attarded or deficient in some way. Boy, were they ever wrong... I learned to speak fluent English by 10 months old and the written form by my 1st birthday. Then I learned spoken & written Hebrew, Yiddish and Latin side-by-side with basic grade school math before I was 2 years old in 2006. I went through spoken & written French, basic geometry & volumetry, basic geography and basic World History in 2007 by the age of 3. And those are just the first few languages I learned in my life; the complete list is in the files but usually I learned one tongue in spoken, written, gestural and musical versions per year."

"My fourth year was heavily loaded; it included the very basics of ecology, biology, chemistry, physics, mechanics, electronics and spoken & written Italian. It was at that point that I began using a child-age V-Tech web computer to learn and work in the evenings. There had been very manual arts & crafts involved: using either Lego Technics or Mecchano to built scaled models, along 'open source' circuit boards, chipsets and peripherals like the PCB (printed circuit boards) with the Snap-On circuits design kits then introduction to Arduino Automation kits. Let's just say that even though these classes were the very simplest of basics, they touched enough of so many fields that it opened my mind and laid the foundation of the bio-medical engineer I have become at the age of 16. In fact, except for gym class that I never did, I managed to learn the entire 'International Science & Exploration' primary curriculum chosen by my grand-parents by the age of 4 in 2008, at the time when every other child just begins kindergarten or can't even use a toilet without adult help."
"I was taught all this mostly by private tutors who came for the day and left in the evening. Since all four adults were very sick, I saw precious little of them each day, only at breakfast and supper. That last year, in 2008, there weren't any celebrations for me despite the massive mental accomplishment I had just succeeded at. My paternal grand-father had just passed on in November 2008, the last of the four to die; so Lawrence took over for a brief period of about two months, from early December 2008 until January 2009. It didn't take him any longer to botch the situation beyond my capacity to forgive or tolerate. He was already deeply ensconced inside the World Power Project near Cape Town in South Africa and didn't want to move from there, not even for the funerals of his parents, let alone to insure my welfare at all. He kept the same nurse that had assisted my parents because she was young enough that she wouldn't be 50 when I turned 18 so that was one problem less to solve. Then in January 2009 he tried to hire a live-in male tutor to teach me what he called 'the basics of schooling and civility' for evolved society."

(The Rolling Stones – Paint It Black)

Lucas held out his hands, laying them flat on the glass tabletop for the three lawpersons to see. "That is the legacy I have from that man's one attempt at 'civilizing the dangerously willful boy' according to the wishes of Lawrence and his cabal of ass-kissers in Washington DC. The man took a length of electric cord from his baggage and split the plastic sheath to splay out the copper bristles like a miniature feather duster. Then, he backhanded me hard enough to make me see stars around my head for a good five minutes then set to work on torturing me. The 84 year old bastard used his greater size, weight and strength to hold my forearms hard enough to deeply bruise the muscles and initiate defensive micro-fractures in the bones as he cruelly whipped my thin, meatless little fingers to bloody ribbons, one hand after the other. When he was done, he stood there with an erection visible through his trousers as he waved that damned wire-whip at my face to scare me worse. He told me I would be getting 'Bblings' of 6 swishes on each hand until I learned to not let them be 'Devil's playthings'. I was supposed to be 'purged' by this destructive pain of the 'Evils' of indocility, disobedience, challenging behavior and 'refusal to admit and accept my subordination in Society and Life' at the feet of Him and his White Jesus God, my self-styled Betters."

The morose teenager sipped some coffee silently while the lawyers shuffled papers and scrolled files on their computers to read the official police reports from the time, as well as see the pictures extracted from the films of the nanny-cams placed around the apartment at the time. When almost ten minutes had passed, all three signaled Lucas to continue.

(Twisted Sisters – We're not gonna take it anymore)

"As you see from the reports, I had just finished a highly sophisticated, technically oriented schooling program that most ten year olds find challenging. I had always watched the morning and evening news on TV for as long as I can remember, so I knew there would come a time when I was attacked. The crime statistics had been explained by the tutors and instinctively I knew I would be amongst the 65% of boys who get attacked physically or get molested and raped. Because of my non-existing physical training, I knew that I couldn't defend myself against a full-on attack without getting maimed and killed; I had to find a defense that would stop the attacker BEFORE he managed to reach me. Since I had done the basics of chemistry and biology during my studies, It was easy for me to produce a small vial of acid corrosive enough to strip paint off wood or blister and melt skin. When the geriatric bastard let me go to gloat, I had the time to reorient myself, take account of my state and realized he was gearing up to beat on my hands again just as soon as he was done rubbing his crotch, getting his cock and balls back in place. As the nanny-cam films show, he planned to beat me until he broke my fingers & hand bones in such way I would be handicapped for the rest of my life. Being forewarned of his intents, I managed despite damaged, profusely bleeding fingers, to take out the only vial of acid I had produced to date, pop the glass stopper and asperse the chemical right in his face."
Mister Aylmer spoke up: "That has got to be the most blatant case of child self-defense against a pedophile / religious extremist that I have ever seen. The local police in Buffalo ruled it so, as did the Youth Court judge and the DCFS. They ruled unanimously that your father was unworthy of having custody of you at that time and so you were shipped to your mother's estate, also in Buffalo. What ever happened to this geriatric criminal? There's no mention of trial/sentence in the files."

Standing up from his chair, using his cane to steady his balance as he reached vertical position, Lucas walked over to the kitchen's drinks brewer and made himself another coffee. As the machine brewed its life-giving liquid, the teenager shrugged dismissively. "At the time, Lawrence actually protected the bastard from prosecution by paying him a chartered Lear Jet out of the USA and back to Britain before the police could charge the man properly. He was supposed to stay in the hospital for a month before being released for arrest. He did lose an eye, an ear, part of his tongue and half his hair, all on the left side as he turned to protect himself from the spray. Lawrence simply hired a private 'med-evac' plane and shipped his problem back to Good Ol'e Britannia before the district attorney could even realize he'd lost his suspect. Of course, even with a money trail a mile wide and not concealed in the least, nobody ever tried to bother Daddy Dearest about his clear witness tampering and removal of a wanted man from the country. He simply has too many connections that protect him in exchange of favors and cash."

Misses Delray quipped "I gather you want us to look into the circumstances of this, adding them to the case of parental inadequacy, incompetence and criminal depravity that we are building? You wouldn't happen to have any idea where this english pervert is located at present, by the way? It could make things easier if we can get live testimony from him."

The young man just fixed his coffee to his taste before walking slowly back to the table, needing his cane as a nasty cramp had partially gimped him. Once sat, he opened the medical belt at his waist and took out the clinical-grade muscle relaxer he had been forced to carry for two years now and took one gelule caplet out. After swallowing his pill with some coffee, the teenager gazed balefully at the lawyers through his meta-glasses, weighing his options before answering the woman's questions. "Yes; he's in a hospice for ailing anglican pastors in county Hertford, north of Greater London. The man is now a disfigured drooling vegetable that farts as the highlight of his day. He is 96 years old and not long for this world, so I doubt anybody will ever get a lucid, coherent statement from him anymore."

Mister Aylmer asked "Were there any testimonies or affidavits taken at the time of his hospitalization in Buffalo, before being absconded back to England? Given his present state, we could use those in court or at least with the Youth Protection agencies here in Canada, to start demolishing your father's pretensions and reputation that way. It's not like Lawrence could get different testimony from the elder man at this point and notarized police reports with DCFS investigation files will seal the deal quite neatly."

Lucas smirked before he answered "Mr Carmello di Sovorone, my attorney in San Francisco, collated the files and sent them to your offices before I had left the USA. He might also have sent them to several child-protection and civil rights watch-dog groups to set Daddy Dearest on the back-foot in the court of public opinion so as to forcibly detach him from his welded-on supporters in several US protestant churches and The Capitol. It won't be a death blow to his network of political contacts in DC but it will be critical enough to initiate the process and make ANY state's attorney worried for their career if they try to force me back into custody under Lawrence's demented criminalities."

"You have gone public already with these files and charges?" asked Mr. Tah in quiet, flat tones. "That is quite the rare reaction, in those circumstances. Most boys, or young men, who were victimized by parents, teachers or preachers rarely speak out publicly, and never by their own
volition. Why did you take this course of action? You do not give me the impression of someone who likes his private affairs getting aired out on the town plaza." he expounded as he contemplated his mysterious young client.

"To take advantage of the 'MeToo' web denunciation campaign; it has the capacity to do with collective public effort what I alone can't do when facing the swarm of church-whores that are lining up to back daddy-dearest and defend his depravities. Lawrence has been advertising himself as a 'Messianic Jew' claiming that 'Jesus is his personal savior' as is the manner of fundamentalist protesters for several decades. Thusly, he has made deep inroads towards the white christian sects of the USA, specifically several that are influential in the white supremacy and neo-nazi movances. I have information about paid contracts that Lawrence took out to have me kidnapped and deported secretly back to Florida to a hidden concentration camp. It is run by an extremist racist church called the Khunestade Clanhold Abbey or by its other more common name: Church of Jesus the Redeemer of Blighted Souls. I will give you the relevant recordings and files sometime later next week after I have been able to back-track and validate everything properly."

Suffer the little children

(Soul Asylum – Runaway Train)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 10:10am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

The forlorn adolescent sat back at the table in silent meditation, otherwise known as sipping his coffee, as the three lawyers wrote, typed and filed notes, queries and official demands for access to public records about their client, his parents and all teachers and institutions he had any contacts with. After about ten minutes of intense activity, the professionals took the time to go make themselves some coffee of their own to have some fuel to process through the next batch of information about their young client's ordeals. To date, it didn't look like he was exaggerating but the case would hinge on how much of the parent's malversations were recent and how many recordings would be deemed legally valid before the courts in either Canada, the USA or the UEO.

"Now then" began Lucas, "in late January 2009, just after my fourth birthday and the geriatric bastard's attack on me, I was sent to live at Cynthia's main home which was also located in Buffalo city due to pressure by DCFS and the local police force. My mother actually lived in that house much to my chagrin. Back then, she had already bought several large condos in New York city and Albany (NYS), Montpelier (Vermont), Boston (Massachusetts) and Portland (Maine) to meet important clients locally. For more personal usages, she had bought a vast horse farm in the forested Green Mountains in northern Vermont but planned to visit there only for vacations, parties and important holidays that would implicate a certain level of high-class shagging with a VIP client."

"You see, that was a recurring theme in my mother's life, and therefore mine, that she liberally pimped herself to those clients she considered important or at least had a visible potential for becoming big-shots in either their careers, domain of activity or in High Society by having inherited a bundle of cash from well established relatives. In fact, dear mom was a bit of a traditional snob in that a millionaire lottery winner wouldn't get her attention but a poor bastard with a big name from an Old-Blood family would always have her coming for more. She had desires for riches, yes, but what always got her blood flowing was the chance of being seen as the highest maven, the best socialite in town. She imagined herself the next Jackie O. Kennedy that would have all of America's women envious of how well connected, positioned and 'loved' by all she had become."
Sipping from his hot drink, the young man took a deep breath to calm himself before continuing the despicable tale of his childhood. "My relationship with Cynthia had been distant, almost nonexistant until that point but became toxic right from the first meeting. When I went to live with her, she was in the process of – wooing – a well-to-do plastic surgeon in his mid-forties who specialized in 'rebuilding' the youthful appearance of the richest socialites in New York State. He even had many celebrities from the NYC television studios as clients in the decade his private practice had been in service. When he saw me, he should have ignored me pretty much the same as he did with his own children back at his 'official' house with his wife. And yes, he was THAT kind of dishonest cheater."

"However, he saw my injured hands and fell in trance at the sight of the convoluted, intertwined scars wrapped around my thin fragile fingers and palms. He explained to Cynthia that such deeply engraved gouges could lead to loss of sensations, loss of mobility and even partial paralysis if left untreated. She would have been against spending that much money, and Lawrence would never have spent to heal me, not when he was in the process of saving and moving out the very cause of my injuries. Instead, the doctor made a deal with her; she would get to be his 'escort' at important functions for the medical association and he would accompany her at NYS Bar Association events thus elevating their mutual profiles and he would then heal my fingers, hands and wrists free of charge."

"At first, mom thought she got the better end of the deal as his medical association functions were few and far between. He dutifully went to each Bar event she attended, even when his own wife and children had events of their own on that same date. All because he was mentally and emotionally mesmerized by the intricacies of the injuries on my hands. When Cynthia realized that his emotions and attention were focussed on me more than her, she threw a fit and simultaneously threw him out of her life, going so far as to dump him as a client. Basically, she reacted like a jilted wife when in fact it was her the mistress that was bulling into the official wife's domain. From that moment on, her anger and distrust towards me were constant, sullying every aspect of every interaction we had."

Taking a few minutes to let the lawyers verify the reports of what he had known of the doctor's name, address and other details, Lucas wondered honestly just how much of all this would actually be helpful in getting him away from his father. Since his mother had relinquished all parental rights when he turned ten, she no longer mattered legally in any sense that mattered to the courts. In fact, she had made it so that her only living child to date could not inherit anything of hers if she were to die. She had willed everything to a political organization devoted to supporting 'absolute parental authority' at every level of a child's life and activities, going so far as to declaring that 'basic human rights' should be afforded a child only if his parents petition the courts for it. Cynthia's descent into barbarity and anti-child bigotry was very much a product of his toxic, violent relationship with her, and nothing good would ever come of it anymore.

Seeing the lawyers were now ready, the teenager spoke up. "I lived four years in Cynthia's house, in Buffalo city. We did not meet often, and every time ended badly in some way for me, even though she never hit me herself. And that distinction is very important; she never beat me with her own hands but always had somebody else do it for her, usually while she was standing there, witnessing the event with great relish, often to the point of orgasmic reaction. The pathetic dumb bitch got her jollies off by seeing me beaten down to the ground and stepped on like a dead rat. Given that her bed warmers were normally criminals with – not many – scruples about human life and dignity, she always had one or two on hand to carry out her wishes to have me degraded. Cynthia, as a criminalist, had access to court records and many police personnel, which conferred her the type of indirect power she craved in order to accomplish her more fundamental goals."

"Cynthia never committed the crimes herself, but she certainly had her fingers on the strings that linked the petty street thugs to the bosses and dons in the plush offices and restaurant backrooms that are the usual hubs for these people. Most of her rather moderate fortune was acquired by acting like a
pimp, she matched small time hoods with high society citizens who had unsavory situations to resolve, then took a commission once the job had been done to everybody's satisfaction. That was her gig you see; she was the middle-woman that made orders pass from client to contractor thus allowing the paying client to remain anonymous, safely out of blackmailing reach, all the while insuring that the criminals did not try to become enterprising without her costly help. From what I saw, she never bedded anybody who wasn't a big regional player in the Mafia, Triad or other large, ancient organization with a history to match her desire for glory and reputation.

"You have on the table near you a box of paper files and electronic archives that I have compiled over the years about her activities and the people involved. There are several hundred criminals and clients who paid for crimes to happen, the list of said crimes, dates, payments, and so forth. This is my bargaining chip to keep my mother off my back and out of my life as safely as can be, given the types of people she associates with in her daily job. Your task will be to weaponize this data then manipulate dear old mom into lending her testimony against Lawrence as well as find a way to force her into disavowing that damnable Political Action Committee that seeks to enslave children and deny them human rights. I don't care to inherit anything she has, that's not the point. I won't elaborate on the details of my deleterious relationship with Cynthia beyond what is in those files and the written summary that was sent your office. In that box, you have an exact, detailed compilation of every crime and assault she committed against me over the six years that I lived under her custody, along with nanny-cam recordings of each event since her house was well wired and fully protected. Necessities of her job, you see..."

Giving the lawyers a few minutes to oversee the cardboard box of files and USB chips, Lucas turned towards the large cast iron stove behind him and leaned his left arm on top of the chair's backrest, allowing himself some time to recover from the revelations he had unveiled. It wasn't lost on the lawyers that he was facing towards them and kept his right hand near his cane pommel. The merry red and yellow flames dancing amongst the pine and spruce logs showed him the kind of peaceful life that could be his, if he persevered in his efforts to secure his liberty from those depraved cretins that sought to enslave him. Looking at the decorative bronze clock sitting on the mantel above the stove, he saw it was still just 10:18am; how the hell had they covered so little of his miserable life in so much time? And why was it so damned early when it felt like he had passed the entire day speaking about nothing consequential?

"If you don't mind, we'll try to accelerate a bit. I would like to have finished explaining my academic achievements before the brunch cart arrives. We can delve back into the marasm of my more personal misfortunes after the meal, once we have all been fortified." Lucas hoped he could explain things faster but he'd never really unpacked the entirety of his life to anybody before and could not really evaluate just how much longer the preliminaries would take.

Receiving assent from all three lawyers, the teenager 'hemmed' a few times as he rewound his mental pathways to organize the lengthy monologue in his mind. It wasn't a real conversation yet, but that would change after the coming meal. Damn, he hated doing this; exposing himself to others like a circus sideshow...

"Now, as of January 2009, whence I had turned four years old, I began to study the modules that followed the 'International Primary Science & Exploration' that my grand-parents had made me follow almost from birth. It was called 'International Secondary Sciences, Health and Humanities' curriculum and, just as the four first years before, it was taught at home by private tutors. I learned what were the actual 'beginner' levels of those techniques and sciences I had skimmed before and delved deeper into the makeup of the human body, mind and soul with several classes on history, geography, sociology, anthropology, politics, ethics, civics and even some archaeology because it cut across many sciences and medical fields. These 'soft' subjects were the basis used to anchor the 'hard' sciences; the tutors took problems from history or present events then showed how a mechanical,
electronic, chemical or biological solution was provided by the means of 'solid' mathematics, logic and deduction. At that point, the teachers didn’t believe I had any intuition or aptitudes to speak of and concentrated mostly on feeding me facts and forcing rote-learning."

"I do mean 'forcing' as Cynthia had made it very clear that she wanted and expected physical punishments to be applied systematically for each mistake I made, even if these were innocent accidents during the learning process. If I forgot something overnight... If I had any spelling errors in a 5 page composition... If I made any errors of mental calculation in an equation most 12 or 13 year olds in high school were allowed a calculator to process during their exams... I got beaten until I had welts. Any tutor that refused to hit me at least once during a lesson was kicked out and had their reputation blasted by Cynthia through her contacts. She even lobbied – but failed! – to have the licenses revoked of at least three tutors over the six years I was subjected to her authority."

"In some extreme cases, the real demented sadists, I did ended up doing like with the old brit bastard that Lawrence had hired: I defended myself with fatal force and I know that at least two died from my retaliations before I was 5 years old at the close of 2009. After that, Cynthia got wise to the fact bodies piling up wouldn't be good for either her reputation or keeping her underworld contacts happy because she was attracting police attention to her house and family."

Mr Aylmer interrupted incredulously: "Are you saying that you killed multiple times before you were 5 years old and NOBODY recorded it or did anything about it? HOW could that happen? Even in the USA something like this would raise red flags at DCFS and the local police department! Not to mention HOW all of that must have impacted your SANITY and emotional equilibrium! WHY are you not in an institution or at least under long-term therapeutic watch?"

The teenager replied blithely "It would have been public knowledge easily enough if mommy dearest (contempt very much emphasized) hadn't been whoring herself physically and monetarily to every DCFS supervisor and Precinct captain in town for a solid month after her first plaything got maimed for life by my acid. She didn't want anybody snooping around her den of iniquity so she liberally spread herself around like a mold colony and contaminated the minds of every official she could touch. It's very simple to understand, when you know the woman's M.O. And it never changed over the years, either."

"So, the barking bitch got afraid of me, but also wised up, then fine-tuned her instructions to the teachers: she ordered them to hit me for exactly the same reasons as before, BUT never leave anything more than reddened skin that must come back to its pasty white coloration within 10 minutes of the punishment happening. With these orders, she made it so every tutor in the day could beat me repeatedly and never leave any marks or injuries, while at the same time staying safely inside the limits before my defensive reflexes triggered armed responses. The only benefit of this whole depraved miasma was that as of the age of 5, she herself demanded that our contacts be limited to the least possible. She had become so afraid of me that she wanted all possible reasons to avoid being in the same edifice as me to stay safe. Although, as explained by some files in the box, she did forget herself several times, like when I was seven years old, especially when she had a big strong dangerous cock-shaker that lit-up the hot spot in her cunt. She could wet enough to fill a dried river bed in a minute when she got truly drowned in the depths of her stupid 'princess & conquering warlord fetish' after said man-whore had beaten me down for her royal satisfaction."

"Anyways, I finished the secondary curriculum in three years as well. By December of 2011, at my 7th birthday, I had received my Secondary Diploma and quite obviously couldn't just walk out in the streets to get a job or start a business without adult assistance. Therefore, I applied for remote classes at a Columbia University located in central New York City itself. I would have the opportunity to do the class material remotely over the Internex but, to my great pleasure, I would be obliged to go pass end-of-year tests in person at their facilities. Cynthia had signed the permission forms blindly (not
much of a lawyer, was she?) and had to deal with it at the end of November 2012 when the exams were coming. She went to pout and whine at her damned horse farm while I got the condo in NYC, all the way through to the third week of January 2013 so I could do my registration in person for the following year of classes at the same University. Since these new classes were far more technical and demanded specialty equipment, Cynthia decided to move me, the nanny and driver to New York permanently for all of 2013. Using money from my trust funds, she bought for me the largish centennial Ramshackle Manor I had been told about by my grand-parents. I moved into MY new house on the first of February. It may have been mine legally, but it still didn't feel like a real home, not with her hirelings still looking over me all day."

"Now; the classes I took for those 2 years were university grade. At age 7 in 2012, I studied for a bachelor's degree in mathematics, algebra, calculus and statistics. As it was mostly reading the textbooks and filling out questionnaires online, I managed to do in 11 months what takes young adults three full years to do simply because I have an idietic memory and I can process calculations much faster than the average mind."

"The second diploma, at age 8 in 2013, was a bachelor's degree in networking, telephony, Internex servers and the programming of online apps. Again, I managed to do in 11 months what takes 3 years for young adult students to achieve normally. After those kinds of performances during 2 years living in different cities most of the time, Cynthia woke up in a panic at my accomplishments and commanded a meeting with me."

"My dear beloved mother (nasty sarcasm very much explicitly expressed) came to visit me at my large sprawling ancient mansion in northern Manhattan and threw a tizzy at the sight of 2 bachelor's degrees hanging on my wall, in full view of anybody walking into my living room. It scared her to no ends to know that I could now in fact use the phones or Internex systems to haunt her and cause damages to her cabinet and clients if she didn't start loosening the reins on my life and accepting my demands instead of spitting her contempt in my face every time we met."

"First thing that changed was that I ORDERED her to make her damned pets, tutors & clients alike, keep their mitts off my body or ELSE it was her that would suffer an acid spray in the face. She well and truly panicked at that but since I had several vials on my person at all times by then, she had no choice but to surrender or find out just how determined I was. Since she dealt with mongrels, criminals, sadists and mentally deranged hit men all day, she could easily spot the tell signs of a strongly determined killer about to get to business on a target. She caved, and never recovered her strength since. So at age 9, in January 2014, I moved back to Buffalo and settled slowly into what I would eventually consider to be my first real permanent home."

Lucas' First Home

(Two Steps From Hell – Casablanca)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 10:25am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

"In order to RENT peace and the continuation of her good health despite my vicinity, she accepted to buy for me, with my trust funds, a plot of land in south-east Buffalo City in the outer districts of town where the Erie Canal comes into the municipal zone. The plot is between the Kaisertown and Seneca districts, at the junction of St-Ogden street and Mineral Spring road, just after the inclusion of Cazenovia Creek but before the river splits into Buffalo Creek and Cayuga Creek. I wanted a waterfront view with the tranquil walkways besides the canal for some peaceful strolls in the evening
and there were several small city parks nearby, even a historic horse trail that passed just next to the property. It was old, decrepit and so monstrously huge that no house flippers or professional renovators would take on the project by themselves unless a paying client, like me, bought the house first then hired them as renovators afterwards."

"This vast Historic Registry property had three distinct advantages that could be seen immediately."

"Benefit 1) A very large 3,000 by 3,000 feet plot of land [206.61 acres or 1 square kilometer] enclosed by solid red brick walls and wrought iron ornamental fences within a canoe-able wet moat connected to the river/canal. There is also connection to a pair of small natural streams that were converted into bricked rain drainage in 1900 then fully covered during the zone's rapid urbanization in the 1940's as part of the many urgent constructions of industries to help the War effort along the Eastern seaboard. It is to this day the LAST private residential plot of that size anywhere inside the actual Buffalo Metropolitan city limits. Its decrepit, neglected appearance hid many splendors, indeed."

"Benefit 2) The massive plot came with the large 5 storey, turreted manor house and many separate buildings, amongst which were two gems in the rough. A huge 3 storey full-services industrial workshop that had been regularly updated along important technological changes and huge 3 storey barn equipped for processing vegetals into medicinal preparations for wholesale to pharmacies. Since many of the owners' family had been doctors, apothecaries and chemists before and during the House's existence, all the zoning, permits, and licenses were established and put in the name of the incorporated Wise Manor Heritage & Trust that managed the land during the period without a nominal Master, so none of those grandfathered rights were ever lost or cancelled by the city. All I needed to have a steady revenue to pay for the exploitation of the terrain was hire people to clean up, activate the old steam-powered systems, then find suppliers and I was in full production before August."

"Benefit 3) The land was located in what was originally a district of many splendid manors and urban farmsteads seated on large walled plots like itself, just outside the official limits of Buffalo in a zone that was only sparsely developed. In the intervening decades, the area's population and land usage have changed rather badly as the old manors were torn down, the farms uprooted then subdivided into smaller plots and asphalt roads were set to bring in denser motorized traffic. Nowadays, the Old Glory is surrounded by noisy, messy industries fed by the canal, railways and roads besides many low density apartment buildings and cheap motels. This means that it's a very quiet, secluded homestead as there are few direct neighbors to be nosy and all area traffic occurs several hundred feet away from the property line except for the actual river which is the northern boundary of the property."

"To my childish eyes, back when I was 9 years old, this land and manor house represented both freedom and security. The house was built mostly out of heavy steel structure and red bricks with clay tile roofing. The builders back in the 1870's had used railroad tracks & oak rail ties to create the basic framing and timber stays. The bricks, cement and ornamental wrought iron was all welded or molded around this metal structure, making it one of the thickest and strongest residential constructions in the entire city. Each room had either an open fireplace or a cast iron stove to burn wood & coal that were retrofitted to also use gas or oil in the 1930's as they wired in electricity throughout. There was a central live-flame boiler to feed both the potable hot water in the taps and the cast iron heaters spread in the corridors and less active zones of the house."

"The workshop and the barn were built at the same time as the manor, initially as tradesmen's shop and material storage shed respectively during the construction, then they were completed as the proprietor wished for his own uses. Because the landowner had planned to keep and use them for industrial purposes from the get go, they were built with the same techniques and materials as the
main house, with updates to add electricity, convert the wood-burners to hybrids, add telephone cables then networking cables, etc... All were done along the passing years. This house was ancient but solid and reliable, without any pests or contaminations that could be found. It was MY dream home come true."

"Making Cynthia contact the Wise Manor Heritage & Trust in charge of maintenance and security for the house was a backbreaking chore that I helped along with liberal applications of threats and surreptitiously adding minute doses of diverse hand-crafted poisons to her food when she least expected it. Just enough to make her sick enough to be physically non-threatening against me but never that much that she couldn't work from home and stay useful to me."

The three lawyers were studiously quiet as they typed notes and organized files for the visual graph of the timeline of events that they would need to bring up in court. Right now though, they were all wondering how it was that their client was still allowed to walk the streets unfettered. His mind just didn't seem to be that nice a place to live in, truth be told. But then again, his life would have broken many experienced adults long before he reached 7 years old.

Secrets buried in the Mists of Time's Shadows

(Fredric Chopin – Funeral March)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 10:40am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

(These are thoughts inside Lucas' mind; he will NOT tell the lawyers these.)

The Wise Manor & farmstead, seated at 3, Erie Canal Promenade.

Snort! - The place was so old that the only remaining stretch of that street is less than 50 feet long and the only legally active address on it was the Wise Estate. The 'Promenade' was just a miserable little bit of asphalt that linked the manor grounds with Mineral Spring road out of the domain's south wall, which was useless as the edifices were all built along the north boundary near the river's shoreline for easy access to the canal as it was the family's principal method of travel and commercial delivery back in 1870. In fact, the Erie Canal Promenade had never been more than a packed-dirt street until the early 1920's during the Great Depression when the city's mayor tried to create public works projects to employ the hordes of miserable unemployed men starving in the streets. Then the city's urban planning changed radically in the 1940's with WW II demanding a lot of new manufactures, railyards and the streets were getting moved and paved almost every month.

That forlorn plot of untended land with its decrepit unused structures had offered Lucas many advantages, including a physical link to his long lost ancestry on all sides of his forsaken bloodline, as it had been forgotten and abandoned by his immediate parents. But it was his discoveries of what was hidden inside the walls, basements and buried deep in the land besides the official buildings that made the entire place worth all the efforts he gave it since finding out about its existence.

The huge manor had been built in 1870 using a solid-stack floor-plan resembling the Old French Houses of the 1400's and 1500's with some clear 1800's Steam-Age touches like the all-brick construction topped by gray tiled roofing, multiple long thick chimneys wrapped in covered spiral staircases, wrought iron bannisters on all balconies and steel-plate storm shutters at all windows and doors. However, the defining element was that like the houses of Old Europe in those Late-Feudal epochs, the enclosed rooms were not laid against the outer walls with windows looking outside;
instead, all bedrooms, offices, studies and bathrooms were in the middle of the floor back-to-back in a straight line with a coursiive-type corridor between the exterior wall and the internal wall with the doors to the rooms. This was an ancient manner of building an edifice defensively so that people could sleep at peace without fear of spies, explosives or poison devices being thrown into the rooms at night. It also served to move people safely around each level as there were always two paths around each floor to move defenders or escaping family. The manor's windows were bowed outwards to form bays with boxseats thus creating firing alcoves to lodge defensive gunners in case of a siege by enemies of the family.

And yes, THAT architectural detail was voluntary, for just that particular usage, too.

Just like the secret ‘maintenance’ passages that riddled each level in that central structural block between all the enclosed rooms. Officially it was to access the plumbing and electrical wires instead of demolishing the walls but the 10 foot width and full height of the passages along with their separate enclosed stairs, secret elevators, built-in hot-water heating, lighting with both gas and electricity, as well as two full bathrooms hidden on each floor, accessible only from the tunnels themselves, showed a very careful, very deliberate planning. Someone had wanted these corridors to be used more frequently than by just the occasional maintenance worker.

The same could be thought for the fact all three main buildings had 3 basement levels; 2 that were publicly known and the deepest 3rd sub-floor could be accessed only through secret staircases hidden in the floor of the second basement's secret passages. All three main structures had been built with a 10 foot wide tunnel linking them at each level of the basements so that operations could me maintained despite the harshest Lake Erie winter squalls sweeping across the the townships. Other households and industries would be crippled but this domain would not stop working or supporting its owners for any thing at any time.

On a more personal, emotional level, Lucas thought that the secret, heavily reinforced underground bunker was a treasure trove in itself. It had been built in 1940 by Doctor Franklin Henry Wise, at the very beginning of the Second World War, when it was rumored that Germany had biological weapons and the capacity to smuggle them into the USA. This austere, learned man was one of his family's ancestors as he was the grand-son of the man who built the manor. The builder of the House had two sisters; each sister married into what would later become the bloodlines of Holtzenstein and Wolenczak in the early 1900's whilst his son continued carrying the paternal moniker which he transferred to his only son and grand-children thereafter. Several years passed and in the mid 1970's, the two daughters of F.H. Wise marry with Harkady Holtzenstein and Londberg Wolenczak thus partially reuniting the bloodlines. This was later further completed in 1997 when the only living children of each line married, bringing back all of the Wise bloodline under one single roof and inside a single person.

Lucas was that reincarnation of the family's original genetics and history.

Cosanguine, inbred little bastard that he was, no matter that his parents had been married legally.

The original builders of the house had been well-to-do apothecaries, chemists and surgeons, jewish people whose grand-parents had fled the larvated racism and silent discrimination that was rampant in Europe throughout the centuries. They came to America in 1807 but witnessed by newspapers, then cinematic newsreels, and then radio broadcasts, the horrendous wars and atrocities in Europe that wiped out the few last living relatives they had in the Old Countries. So, in 1940, it was the fifth generation of the family to own the land, led by Franklin H. Wise, that saw the developments in Europe as sign the german & russian pogroms could come to their doorstep in their lifetime. Hence, they contracted the best architects and engineers they could find, which happened to be military men; handicapped survivors of WWI or WWII's first throses that were peddling what they knew best:
fortified concrete and shielded decentralized infrastructures.

Therefore they built this massive, superb bunker of 600 x 600 feet on a height of 3 storeys with 10 feet thick armored cement outer walls. They built using battleship-grade steel girders and plates for the base structure, leftovers from the many damaged vessels of WW I that were brought back to the USA for scrapping and recycling as a way to finance the country's war costs. The process was actually to dig a giant 100 feet deep hole then lay a concrete foundation pad of 10 feet thick then build on top; the hole would be filled up when all had been constructed to specs. The owners had asked for tunnels that joined the bunker with two secret entries in the 3rd basement of each surface building plus a seperate boat-dock tunnel that reached the Erie canal / Buffalo River for a small 20' motorboat to leave in secret and four distinct escape connections with Buffalo city's brick sewage tunnels that had been built in the early 1900's. The escape tunnels started in the bunker's lowest level as they had to pass under both the property's wet moat and the public waterway itself to reach the new sewage tunnels built in the new urban developments on the opposing shores of the river.

The teenager would NEVER SAY to anybody alive WHAT he found in that house's secret passages and especially not what was buried in the bunker. It was his escape plan, his bolthole, if everything went pear-shaped as it usually did in his life. Not even his other lawyers in Buffalo or San Francisco had ever been made aware and these three certainly wouldn't know about it.

Controlling information and perspectives

(Two Steps From Hell – Fearless)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 10:40am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Blinking his eyes slowly as he brought himself out of his thoughts, Lucas spoke aloud again: "I was in love with that old, dingy, decrepit manor house the moment I saw it." the boy spoke with rare emotion, the one genuine display the lawyers had seen this morning. "I had known about the place since infancy as my grand-parents had taken me to see the land and visit the house. What Cynthia didn't know, and wouldn't have cared about, was that it actually was the ancestral domain of both her's and Lawrence's families. The reason neither of us were in line to inherit anything was that my great-grand-father Franklin Wise created the Trust to manage things until one of his descendants had enough education and business success like him and his parents before him to purchase the property back from the Trust. The angry, austere, spartan old man didn't want anybody to have any sort of easy go at life; if you wanted his old home, you'd have to strain, force and bleed for it, like he had to."

It's because I had visited the house several times before I was 3 years old and I now owned it that I had decided which studies I wanted to do for that year: a bachelor's degree in 'Laboratory Techniques, Equipments and IT management for Health Sciences'. Since the property had some acreage of well maintained medicinal herbs and the barn was full of transformation machinery, it was child's play to set the production line back to rights and have it churning out the traditional recipes again. By the middle of the year in July, I had a massive clean home with household staff and an actually functional business generating revenue to pay for it all, with almost no efforts besides the damned flow of paperwork."

"So, by December 2015 at my 10th birthday, I had hung another bachelor's degree to my list of accomplishments and was enjoying the winter holidays in my Master Study, in my large, plush urban manor when Untold Evil came knocking to my door on the 29th. Lawrence was in town and had just
spent three days secretly negotiating a sweet deal with Cynthia to take my legal custody off her hands. The miserable fucking bastard busted down my door, storming in escorted by a pair of his favorite low-born cock-shakers as mercenaries to scare me into immediate submissiveness to his will."

The teen made a nasty smile that showed all teeth when he glared at the lawyers as if they were enemies as well. "The first criminal rushed at me, hoping to get to me faster than I could launch my acid spray at his head to maim him out of the fight. Idiot redneck mick! I was young but I knew that if you don't change your patterns, you get scoped and somebody will eventually bypass that pattern and reach you to hurt you bad. I didn't attack with acid; I threw a small metallic cylinder the size of a small pen that spread a four feet wide cloud of gaseous contact poison. My very own, private recipe of a paralytic chemical that I had manufactured with the antique medical equipments in the House as well as extra chemistry tools in the workshop and medicine processing barn. Lawrence's minion #1 dropped to the floor, soon followed by minion #2 who was rushing in behind his partner and got a faceful of gas just the same."

"Seeing Lawrence stand there flabbergasted, eyes wide in fear and shaking in suppressed rage all the same was a real rush for me. I let the gas disperse than grabbed the cast iron fireplace poker and charged the damned bastard before he recovered his mental means. I even got in a couple of good whacks at his chest and left arm before he got in the game for real and started fighting back. We hurt each other pretty bad, that time, but the counter-fucked retard didn't get anywhere near as lucky and dominant over me as he had hoped to be. He came to my land dreaming of glorious conquest and injuring me bad enough that I would be handicapped for life; bound to a life-support wheelchair and as useless as he always accused me of being since birth."

A nasty, enraged snort of contempt emitted from the child as his face adopted a rictus of such soul-deep visceral anger that two of the lawyers began to worry about his mindset whilst the criminologist could only marvel at the fact the young male was still more-than-marginally functional to this date.

"That was my New Years' Gift from daddy dearest; he had obtained final legal custody AND DISPOSITION of my person from Cynthia who had gone so far as to disown and renege me for all times. After my household staff - loyal only to me - separated us and gave basic care to my wounds until I could reach a hospital, NOT Lawrence's or his minions, we sat down in the Master Study and came to an understanding. Since I got basic care while he was still bleeding, holding a broken arm and busted ribs as much as me but without the pain pills and bandages, Lawwy-dearie was quite in a hurry to speak up, negotiate and then leave to reach medical care ASAP. He knew damn well I wouldn't give him any help nor let my employees waste resources on him. As he tried to shake his great and mighty manhood in my face, I got fed up with his bullshit and took up the fireplace poker again. Right in front of him, with my staff watching almost eagerly I could say, I clobbered to death the two paralyzed mercenaries he had brought to do me harm. I sat back in my large plush wingback chair and laid down the laws for our relationship for the rest of the time until I turned 18 or became emancipated."

"Being very much afraid at that time and in a hurry to get medical treatment, Lawrence accepted everything and even signed on it right then and there as all the documents had been prepared in advance by my own lawyers from the Wise Manor Heritage & Trust. As for 'how' I knew about Lawrence and his visit in time to have the lawyers draw up the papers and prepare my inscription at Stanford in the Young Prodigies Program at the same time? Well, I had used all I had learned in my telephony & networking studies to hack then overwatch the offices and multiple homes of Cynthia along several of her favorite contacts in the criminal underbelly of Buffalo and New York. The moment she began speaking with her ex-husband about taking my custody in October, I was aware and began to prepare accordingly."
The blond-haired boy turned merciless hard eyes on the three lawyers seated at his table. The three adults tried to hide the shiver of fright that slithered down their backs as he contemplated their uses in his life and whether they knew too much already. Making a moue of distaste at the fact he was so exposed to so many strangers, the adolescent turned back to sipping some of his sugary coffee before continuing with his story.

"That little confrontation had put me through the ringer and I walked away with several broken bones, contused internal organs and two different concussions but I had won the fight for the time being. I went to the same clinic of that doctor that had initially fixed my hands and got some world-class treatment and pain management for everything Lawrence had done. Ever since I had met him, that doctor had been a very good friend and my multiple, periodic injuries kept him interested in me just enough that he always opened the door and afforded me the best of care. Defective bastard. Anyways, as per MY planned schedule, I waited until passed the turn of the year to get a private plane chartered by daddy dearest to take me to Stanford. He really didn't want anybody asking out loud WHY I was in such a state of injury so he very nicely paid for a Lear Jet to take me, my equipment and personnel from Buffalo to San Francisco where we got stashed in a 5 star hotel for 3 days until the Young Prodigies' rep came to fetch me."

Nourishing interlude

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 11:00am - Brunch

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Lucas looked at the hour on his portable workstation that was still wired to the center of the table. Seeing the time, he stood to go open the door for the service cart bringing their food. Just as he was reaching the entry to the suite, the soft tone and Alexa's voice indicating a person asking to enter sounded across the apartment. Giving a brief gaze at the monitor besides the door, the boy opened and guided the server to push the cart on the side of the kitchen where the ovens were as they would not be needed for the day. The young employee smiled pleasantly at his younger client, but stayed silent as he unsplooled and connected the cart's electrical cord to the wall outlet to keep the cart's tempered compartments at proper settings. With this done, the server pushed a few buttons to activate some small LED's around the cart to make seeing inside the food platters or the internal boxes easier.

Lucas handed the server a 10$ tip as he left then closed tightly the door after him. Gesturing to the lawyers, he invited them to set their notes and electronics aside for the break. The young man set his cane against the side of the cart to pick up a plate to serve himself a warm meal to have some fuel to work on; the telling of his later years of life would not be any easier than his childhood had been.

The teenager took something easy to digest for his first course; some toasted bread slices, hash brown potatoes, a pair of sunny-side up eggs, bacon slices, a small bowl of baked beans and some thin slices of watermelon.

The lawyers were not foreign to high class hotels as Vancouver had it's share of them but the idea of a buffet cart served directly in the room was a new bit of luxury for even them. All three adults took similar plates of toast, eggs, potatoes, meats, waffles, muffins, fruits or beans to their tastes.

All four persons were concentrated on their plates and drinks for the following half-hour until they went for a second course to fill the last little cravings with either a bit more meat or something sweet with maybe some cheese and fruits to nibble on as the conversation would slowly start up again.
Lucas was now sitting with a plate holding a small rolled crepe filled with apple and pear slices drizzled in caramel, with more potatoes, a sausage and some cheese, with his third mugful of coffee of the day. Leaning back into the backrest of his chair, the adolescent watched the slow, careful movements of the adults who were finishing their meals in utter silence as if any stray sounds they made might trigger an episode of murderous rage from their 'special' client. Huffing in amusement at the fact his meagre self could induce such fear in grown adults, Lucas decided to direct his attention to his food and wait until his guests had finished their plates before suggesting they could start up again.

After sufficient time to finish their food and let everyone use the washroom, the lawyers got their writing kits back in proper working order to continue debriefing their client on his life and what he needed from them.

Back in the saddle

(Two Steps From Hell – Ironheart)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 12:15pm - noon

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

With the table cleaned back to working configuration, everybody resumed their chairs, primed their recording devices and were ready to give it another go.

The rich, self sufficient adolescent who had so many deleterious secrets hidden in his closet seemed perfectly at ease waiting for the older folk to be set. From the outside, he seemed indolent, restive and unworried about all events around the room. It couldn't be further from the truth. Internally, he was running simulations and computing what the chances were that these so called 'lawmen' would turn against him and sell out his secrets or even give public testimony about his being completely, irreparably bonkers beyond all capacity of society to tolerate.

The fact they were more right than wrong about THAT was unimportant in the Order of Things.

"Okay, now we get to Stanford and it's much falsely vaunted 'Young Prodigies Program' that everybody loves to hear about. Creating the little geniuses that are the bright shining hopeful future of America, the Great and Exceptional. - Behrk! - There's nothing bright, shining or hopeful about that bunch of smarmy egotistical bastards, I can tell you that! Most are juvenile delinquents looking for a quick fix or else are so cowed by the impossible demands of angry, psychologically abusive parents that they often fall to depression and the cheap vices that are sooo easy to get amongst the university crowds. Other kids just give up and follow mindlessly until they reach age 18 then leave, never be found again."

"For my part, I experienced most of the very worst sides and activities associated with these so-called 'prodigies in-the-making' and it's nothing like the brochures and recruiters tell you. A lot of these little miscreants live off their parent's money and indulgences like leeches, sucking out the juices and liveliness of others no matter the consequences to those persons. A lot tend to plagiarize ideas shamelessly or even steal objects under the pretense 'it's due to them' or that they will 'have a better, more scientific usage for the item' than you. All self-serving, childish, immature crap to justify thievery and mental laziness; nothing more than that."

"Anyways, I came to Silicon Valley badly injured and couldn't start up with the average kids in the program right away. I had to heal, then have some physiotherapy for my broken arm and leg and
some medications to fight off infections from the operations needed to reset the bones and take out
the free-moving shards lest they nick veins. The solution was both brilliant and basal at the same
time. Stanford University is a massive campus, big enough to be recognized as a small town if it
wanted to; as such they have their own private hospital to handle the problems that occur with the
staff, their families and the students. It also serves as the teaching facility for the medical faculty so I
was able to meet and work with a lot of my future teachers and student-colleagues. I rented a private
single-bed room in that hospital and tutors from the Prodigies' Program came to visit me to establish
the paperwork, create my customized study plan, set the class schedules for the year, etc... Given my
precarious situation, I decided on a path that surprised many at the time."

"I spent about four months in that hospital before moving into the actual Prodigies' dormitory setup
and used that time to get into medicine related classes to better understand the human body in general
and how to heal myself when injured. I pursued a Paramedic license (grade 1), a traumatology nurse
license (grade 1) and received a certificate for hospital orderly training. These three combined
together allowed me to ask for and obtain in December 2015 an 'attestation of pre-med studies'
instead of wasting a whole year going through what is essentially a high school seventh year
focussing on biology, chemistry and human health."

The lawyers were sifting through the paper files to find and annex the hard copies of the licenses and
certificates mentioned so they had those in proper order for the court presentation. Ms Delray knew
that from an immigration standpoint, all money aside, any trained medical practitioner with his
diplomas in hand would get fast-tracked through processing as the country lacked enough qualified
personnel to care for all the elderly and indigents they had. Not to mention the sorts of fundamental
research the boy was going into; neurology, neurochemistry, neurosurgery and others with the aim to
find cures to dementia, senility, Alzheimer's, traumatic comas... Yes, she could see how the Canadian
Government would want to rapidly decide this case and gamble on his becoming a quiet, helpful
citizen once he was removed from the deleterious influences of his birth parents and their
mercenaries.

After five minutes of paper pushing, Lucas spoke up again. "For the year 2016, I studied my way
through my first Mastery degree 'Mechanical & Cybernetics engineering for public utilities services'
that I accomplished inside of the year. I again out-performed adult students who normally need at
least two years to power through the studies and class work. That was my first post-graduate diploma
and I was rightly proud of it. The other 'prodigies' were put off by my capacities and that caused the
emergence of childish snobbery on their part against me. They had also started hearing about my
electronics company that built small IT systems and devices custom-built for dedicated uses. That in
itself started up the trend of the more bullish boys trying to mooch cash or items off me on the
pretense that 'I could afford it' or that 'I owed passage & protection fees' to them for being in their
house. I NEVER mentioned the Wise Manor Heritage & Trust and its associated companies in
public, except the Stanford recruiter and he was bound by a Non-Disclosure clause in the contract.
The only corporate activity of mine the kids and tutors ever heard of was the Wolenbahn Electronics
Inc, especially once I rented the first office spaces in Stanford Campus to set up my local division to
start serving customers in the university labs and companies around the university's township."

In 2017, I studied through the Mastery degree 'chemical/biochemical engineering & molecular
design' that was the real prelude to my life's work; the neural interface and its afferent neuroplexic
programming. After giving so much time to mechanics, electronics and technology at large, I needed
to start focusing on my long term goal: improving the minds and living conditions of those patients
suffering from dementia, senility, Alzheimer's or fallen into traumatic coma. A set of classes focused
on the design, creation and analysis of new medical chemicals and bio-agents was exactly what I
needed at that point of my studies. Not to mention that the 'pure mathematics' implicated throughout
the entire class-load was mentally stimulating and a nice challenge compared to running cables or
welding circuitboards for Internex consoles. The fun part of that diploma was how we learned to
create diverse types of chemicals then put them in 3D and 4D printers to create bio-absorptive implants to both cure an infection & keep the body parts aligned whilst the healing process occurs. This idea was incredibly useful for dealing with shattered or fragmented bones like I had suffered a few times during my life."

In the year 2018, I studied through the only doctoral degree that I ever worked for. I chose to honor my ancestors, Franklin H. Wise and forebears, by going for the Medical Doctorate degree 'Theoretical & Developmental Pharmacology & Chemotherapy'. This allowed me to study basal chemistry up close, get better laboratory techniques, and learn how to diagnose patients through biological samples to see if the medications prescribed were effective or had adverse effects. I learned how to create from scratch or re-compound several medications into one while altering the taste, texture and odor to make it more user friendly."

"I wrote my doctoral thesis on the subject of '4D-printed cortical implants as pharmacological vehicles for palliating disease-induced cerebral dysfunctions' in which I made a very clear demonstration that implants of certain shapes could deliver medications directly into the affected areas to help alleviate not only the symptoms but the very causes of certain mental illnesses. Furthermore, my newly created type of implant utilizes '4D-printing' which means that you print it out as a straight filament but the moment it touches a substance it is programmed for, like the grey matter in the brain, it reacts and starts to change shape until all the molecules are rearranged into the desired final form. This means that the surgical application of the implant could now be done via needle & catheter instead of craniotomy. Also, since the implant is built from the medication itself, it is slowly consumed by the body as the diseased area is cured thusly closing the surgical tunnel created by the needle during the insertion. This means total physiological repair and no solid metal or plastic device left in the patient after the treatment has run its course. The possible applications foreseen are limitless." The three lawyers were giving the boy the gimlet eye; just HOW the hells did a kid at THAT age come up with those sorts of research subjects, let alone have the brains to accomplish it successfully?

"Now, that diploma is LEGALLY VALID across the USA, Canada and most of Europe" Lucas continued with visible pride, "BUT I would need to take the Pharmacist Board's examinations in order to have the legal right to practice pharmacy with the open public like, let's say, Walgreen's. As it stands, my diploma allows me the right to be called 'doctor', 'pharmacologist' or even append the letters 'DP' to my name and work in a clinical context like a research lab; just not in direct contact with patients like your local pharmacist."

The teenager snorted in sarcastic amusement at the idiocy of adults the world over. "This ain't another episode of 'Doogie Howser MD', folks. I can't legally pass the pharmacist's exams anywhere on the planet as the countries where I would want to practice with patient-contact all mandate a minimal age of 21 to allow you into the testing program because practically all the public pharmacies operate under territorial laws specifying their workers must be 21 years old. They ask for that age to manipulate the chemicals and legally prescribe drugs because alcohol, tobacco and firearm laws are usually all based on that age too. Therefore, just because of my age, a large sub-class of medics and health sciences professionals refuse to call me 'doctor' since I don't have the actual licenses in hand yet, despite the fact that I can legally own the company, the chemicals, do the tests and then sell the compounds anyways, so long as all the laboratory permits are paid. All the hoopla is just transparent ageist bigotry aimed at forcing a very young person that doesn't have the experiences and stubbornness that I have to go and make a bad deal with an older, licensed pharmacist if they really want to work in direct-to-patient service. I don't; I want to be in my lab, creating chemicals and devices that will then be sold to hospitals who are the ones in charge of usage. As such, the standard 'pharmacology' diploma and its usual laws, licenses and permits suits me just fine."
Mister Tah raised a finger and stipulated "You can ask to be addressed as 'doctor' as long as you work in a closed clinical or research setting BUT never have contact with patients or anybody other than the health professionals who pass orders for specific chemical preparations? Is that the lay of the situation? That seems more than a bit hypocritical to me. I gather this is the influence of the syndicates and professional orders coming to play."

Mister Aylmer countered that blithely "It's more like a driver's license: you can pass the classes and get the diploma but the 'privilege' of driving on public roads must be earned through a process of government mandated testing and licenses per vehicle classes. The same government can punitively remove your license but can't take the diploma away nor erase the knowledge from your head. It's the same with medicine in many cases. There are plenty of migrants who come to Canada with diplomas from their home countries but are unable to practice here because they don't pass the exams to get the legal licenses required. And I wouldn't be surprised to see we have a minimal mandated age for medical licenses too, just like Europe and the USA probably have."

Have a rotten New Year 2018

(Fredric Chopin – Funeral March)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 13:45pm

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

The teenager snorted in anger and told the adults "It's that year, on 27th December 2018 just days after my birthday, that I was ambushed and almost raped in my bedroom at the brownstone in Stanford. You have the exhaustive collection of police reports, medical reports, affidavits and court hearings' files. I don't want to be rehashing the judicial minutiae of the investigation today but we need to go through at least the basics so you can understand what Lawrence is all about. Then we are going to power through the rest of this damnable life of mine and eventually talk about the real threats coming at me as we speak."

Seeing no signs of contestation on the adults' faces, the boy continued immediately. "As you were told in the court files and DCFS reports, after my attack I escaped with little superficial injuries until Lawrence got his hands on me. Normally, the sick bastard wouldn't have been able to get near me, but this time he got sneaky to achieve his goal. He told the police officers at the Stanford station where I was called in to give my formal deposition that I had an 'anxiety disorder' making me panic easily so they should put a 'mild' sedative in whatever drink or food they would offer me to make me calm down and cooperate civilly. Most of the cops refused to drug me without telling me in advance, but one accepted a discrete bribe and passed me a poisoned coffee. That spiked drink made me groggy enough to answer questions intelligently but with little emotion and almost no self-preservation instincts. It was this period of reduced mental capacities and awareness that Lawrence exploited to get me out of police custody and into a hotel just on the border of Stanford campus. Once in the 5-star room, he began to beat me with abandon, breaking many ribs, dislocating an arm and severely damaging both legs, especially in the thighs and knees."

The teenager waited for a few minutes while the adults flipped sheets of paper in the official reports to confirm the timeline and explanations given by the young man. After getting the signal from all three lawyers, the boy continued his story. "Now, during the car trip from the police station to the hotel, I had been groggy but aware of events. Lawrence was in the front alone, driving the rental, and I was alone in the backseat. I faked being more out of sorts than I really was, so I managed to take out and dry swallow a general antidote pill against date-rape drugs to try and counteract the extra sedative that I had realized I had been poisoned with. Taking that broad-spectrum anti-poison
helped clear my senses but my physical reflexes were still sluggish, slowed down and a lot weaker, less strength even in fine hand movements."

Eyes vacant, looking ahead of himself but seeing only the painful, miserable events of his past, the teenager spoke in a low, monotone voice that carried little of what he actually felt inside. The lawyers wondered if he was too disconnected from those passed events, too self-controlled as a matter of course or too emotionally damaged (as in 'rendered insane') by all the suffering and degradation in his young life to fully feel normal human emotions anymore. After several breaths of silent contemplation, the youth spoke again.

"Once in the hotel room, Lawrence started by ranting at me all his blames and accusations; all the weaknesses and failings of his personality and life, he tried to place them on me. Then, like a switch flipped in his head, he literally jumped at me over the low coffee table and dumped all his dead weight on me, knee leading right into my gut. We fell and tumbled around on the floor, knocking about furniture, punching, kicking, screaming and all at each other. My abdomen was ablaze with pain but my survival instincts finally kicked in. I grabbed a small decorative item that fell to the floor and whacked him in the face repeatedly, near an eye, until it was him that pulled away in panic at the fear of getting blinded. He jerked away, scrambling back on all fours then got to his feet. That was when he got a good stride and kicked me right in the face, then the stomach, then the neck, then the gut again, and he started kicking me all over the torso and legs until I ended up screaming in pain and shame louder than him. That was the moment he grabbed a fallen, broken lamp to rip off the electric cord to wield it as a whip against me. He came to my prone, agonizing form and ripped off my flannel shirt and T-shirt, then beat me with that wire-whip until my torso and arms were ripped and shredded, and the furnishings and us both were all covered in blood spatter."

"At that point I achieved finally a higher level of wakefulness and physical reactivity because of the adrenaline and endorphin released during the fight. I managed to pull an acid-burst capsule out of a hidden slot in the waistband of my jeans and throw somewhere towards Lawrence. It blew out in a four feet wide cloud that immediately began to eat through his clothes and skin, disfiguring him so badly in just a few seconds that he panicked beyond control or reason. He ripped off most of his clothes then grabbed the shreds of my shirts to try and rub the acid mist off his skin in attempt to save his face, especially his eyes and mouth. As soon as he was done in his vain attempt to wash off the acid, he grabbed at my hair to pull me off the floor but backed away immediately when he saw I had another capsule in hand ready to throw. Instead he raged at his impotence against my defenses, against my will to survive and be free of his depraved violence. He took a run at the entry door of the suite which he yanked open and yelled at me like a madman to get out and never come back to him. He was casting me out of the family, reneging me as his son and cursing me to live alone and unwanted as I deserved. I had to find a way to get off the floor by levering myself against the furniture, then lean on said furnishings to make my way to the door on two badly injured legs that had multiple breaks and shatters in them and somehow, on raw adrenaline alone, make it out to that corridor alive. As soon as I raised my hand with the capsule of acid, he screamed in fury and ran the other way, to hide inside the bedroom with the door locked to keep me from following."

"The moment the gormless bastard was out of sight, I crumbled to the floor in unspeakable pain but I couldn't just stay there, vulnerable to another attack. I had to leave the suite by crawling on my belly like a damned worm, the dead-weight of my destroyed legs trailing agonizingly behind me, into the corridor to try knocking on the doors of the other suites until somebody answered my pleas for help. Finally, as a kind couple of parents in town to visit their kids for the holidays answered their door, Lawrence ran out of his suite in full flight mode, suitcase and briefcase in hand. The counter-fucked spawn of a gutter-stain even had the inhumanity to give me one last kick in the hip on his way to the elevators and the rental car in the parking lot. The two adults I had been talking to were appalled but too slow to react so the criminal escaped back to his besancted WPP, out of US jurisdiction again."
"The adults called 911 on a cellphone and the hotel security on the internal lines at the same time, all
the while trying to dispense what little help they knew how. It took mere minutes for the security to
arrive, the cops on their heels and paramedics last. The worse of it all was that I was completely
conscious and aware, responding to the medics and cops for the entire ambulance ride all the way
until they put me on a dialysis machine to cleanse my bloodstream of contaminants. If they didn't do
a system-wide purge, they couldn't properly sedate me to operate on my legs to take out the free-
moving bone shards or repair the two knee joints which meant that I could either lose the legs
entirely from internal damages, infection or even get a blood clot. So, they put me on dialysis while
taking X-rays with a portable machine, and doing the basics with me awake and no sedation. What
fun times those were!"

The boy stood up slowly and gazed angrily at the people supposed to be on his side of things. He
didn't trust them yet, and certainly didn't like them after just a few short hours, but he had little choice
if he wanted them convinced to help fully. Reaching behind his back, the teen flicked a few buttons
on the recorder in the hidden pocket to set it on WiFi before undoing the wires and pulling off the
turtleneck shirt to show them his torso and arms.

The three adults couldn't believe their eyes at the sight of so many interlaced scars weaving across
and through each other. The child's skin was scored liked the multi-level reliefs on a church vault or
the gold filigree on a High Lady's wedding necklace. They could see the base layer of skin with
raised scarring and deep furrows dug through the epidermis that never healed properly so they
formed vales and canyons across his chest, back, flanks and all over the arms. There was at least
45% of his upper body marred permanently by whipping scars and injuries that would never heal on
their own. The boy would need extensive plastic surgeries between ages 20 and 25 to attenuate the
worse damages but the chances of complete removal were nil. There would be scars and traces of
this traumatic assault on his health and dignity for the rest of his existence. Unless he spent a few
million dollars on total epidermal grafts like those horribly burned by fire and acid sometimes could
afford. This boy certainly had the money and medical resources at hand. Maybe, if he lived long
enough, he could exercise that option.

"I won't lower my jeans unless you specifically need to see for yourselves." Lucas warned them. "I
have a lot of injury scars and surgical scars on both thighs and knees. They had to pull out bone
shards and fill-in the holes with a bio-ceramic aggregate of my own invention to rebuild my bones.
Even then, it wasn't solid enough to allow for standing or moving upright so they had to implant
thermoplastic slats and rods chemically glued into grooves they routered along the outsides of the
long bones to inlay the plastic and cover it with aggregate to cement everything in place
permanently."

The young man waited for the lawyers to finish looking at his chest then at the medical photos and
scans of his legs, knees and pelvic bone arches before continuing the gory details.

"At least, the implants that my workshops custom-crafted for me are non-metallic and therefore non-
magnetic. They won't make sensors scream or get charged electrically in the wrong conditions. They
have less expansion and contraction in temperature changes as well. But the best thing about them is
that they were crafted using the 4D chemistry that I devised so they will slowly be decomposed and
absorbed by my body as the bones are repaired by the cells. That means that in about 6 years, the
implants and the voids created to house them will have vanished, leaving me whole again."

Since the lawyers had no rational way to answer the situation, they silently went back to notating the
files, ordered them, then took a short break to refill coffee and get some dry cookies to help settle the
sudden flux of acid and bile they experienced. The teenager pulled his shirt back on and reconnected
the wires of his devices. Once ready, he sat in quiet observation of the adults' movements in dreary,
moribund silence until they were all seated and ready to pursue hearing his miserable lifestory again.
"It is rather obvious that I had to again spend a lot of time in the Stanford University Hospital and I even got lucky enough to rent the exact same room as four years before. I was well known and well liked by the Faculty of Medicine as well as those in Pharmacology, Biology, Health sciences and several technical domains. Getting them, for a reasonable surcharge that I billed to Lawrence after adding my medical bills, admin fees and even a 50% profit margin, to again work with selected tutors on a customized January to December schedule as I had done for all my life. That was my key to success, you see. I always studied at home or office and only attended laboratories to hand projects or publically present my results like the other students did, plus the exams, although even those were a bit specially-made too. Because I didn't need to move around so much and could work at my own speed, I was free to indulge my workaholic nature and do 12 to 16 hour days all week and not be bothered for it by anyone."

"During that hospitalization that lasted from December 2018 to March 2019, I moved around in a motorized wheelchair that I customized along the way. I did my studying, coursework and company business out of my private hospital room and the staff were very helpful with it, just like the first time in 2014. Also, just like at age 10, I used my time in hospital and the 11 months of physiotherapy afterwards to get my paramedic license up to grade-2 by December 2019 since I was living inside the teaching clinic anyways. It made for a nice little side-project to my main studies for the year. Then in April of 2019, the imbeciles at Stanford Administration decided to make a grand token gesture to thank me for not suing them into debt by giving me the much lauded Doctorate (PhD) Honoris Causae; 'History of the laws and culture of medicine in North America'. Yeeeppp folks! I got me a second doctorate degree just because I'm such a nice guy! - SNORT!"

Mr Tah mentioned rather blithely "That does sound like a useless bone they threw you to make you happy and 'silent' about any problems their 'Young Prodigies' students might be experiencing. It's not like that particular diploma gave you a license or permit into a restricted field. It could get you a teaching job in history, law or medical history at collegiate level, though, which is a nice fall-back to have in case you did develop permanent handicaps. And I'm sure they would have made several efforts to accommodate your mobility and necessities to not lose you as a student or R&D partner. Just your very superficial expose of your doctoral thesis has proven this to me. I do not see the Stanford admins making efforts to kick you out, much to the contrary. The are most certainly quite cross to have lost you so unprovokedly."

The other two lawyers were quiet as they finished typing their notes and appended them to the already impressive collections they each had gathered this morning. Lucas focussed on the asian man, answering "That is why I haven't terminated my contracts with them for R&D or using their students and teachers in Wolenbahn's production workshops. The relationship with Stanford will continue as long as it's profitable and can run on automatic through the lawyers and my company's admins."

"Speaking of which, it was during the initial phase of the medical treatments in January 2019 that I decided to find different offices, big enough to serve as a permanent apartment to live in, do my corporate affairs, studies, class projects and receive my tutors civilly as well. It so happened that during negotiations with The World Bank in early February, for a Web Tier-2 cyber-security contract worth barely 11 millions, that they told me about their secured HQ in San Francisco and further investigations revealed it to be exactly the ideal solution to my needs. So, in March 2019, I signed the rent for 10 years, ordered renovations and upgrades, ordered some new custom furniture designed to help my recovery and autonomy post-care, and kept up with my ongoing classes, projects and businesses."

"So now," Lucas grumped, "We come to the year 2019's main work whence I studied for the Mastery degree 'applied technologies of biomedical engineering' which I managed to cram into a single year like every other study program that I undertook. Home tutoring is suuuuch a damned fine
thing, especially with mail-in tests and courier-delivered projects! Now that I lived isolated in the World Bank's well secured office building in San Francisco, away from the juvenile criminals, I could work all day and all night without any fears of having trouble knock down my door, catching me alone and unaware while injured and practically immobile to boot. As such, I could maintain my intense studies on one hand while working the complex programs needed by my high-paying clients on the other."

"We now come to the close of Stanford and my moving here. In 2020, I studied for the Mastery degree 'Applied Sciences of Neurology, Neurochemistry and Neurosurgery' and deposited my end of studies project and thesis in front of a packed auditorium. The neural interface, the psychotronic computer and the neuroplexic programming needed to run all the connections between machines and living patient. When I demonstrated publicly my capacity to interact with the mind of a comatose patient that his family had volunteered, the Stanford Board of Promotions put me up for a Doctorate (PhD) Honoris Causae in 'Psychiatric Cybernetology, Psychotronics & Neuroplexic Programming' with the actual medical practice licenses attached & legally active de facto. Needless to say that this decision caused several waves in the medical communities across North America and Europe due to several contesting my age, my lack of patient-care experience and the fact I was basically unknown, amongst other things."

Mister Tah commented: "This copy of the DHC; it's notarized by the Stanford Promotions Board, therefore it has validity anywhere that the University's diplomas have credence. Given it is Stanford, that means almost everywhere on Earth and its orbit. The opinions of a few malcontents will not deter from this in front of the courts or professional orders. Especially since what I hear are arguments based on ageist bigotry and protecting their own limited standing inside their professional orders. There should not be any problems in getting your educational and professional standings recognized by Immigration Canada nor the Ministries of Education or Medicine. The licenses and permits though, might still be subjected to age limitations, but maybe the provincial and federal governments could be open to negotiations to certify at least the basic rights for research not involving patient contact."

"I concur" Ms Delray added tersely. "Often enough in the sciences, there is controversy that the government ignores systematically because it is artificially manufactured by cults and preachers that seek powers to which they have no legal or moral rights. As such, the diverse committees in charge of validating diplomas from other nations have become quite adept at ferreting out such petty religious or political manipulations that are attempted against a fully educated doctor or scientist. Do not fret; we will present this in open court and have the pros line up to support you, no matter what some misguided individuals might try to stir up by themselves."

"It is now 15:00pm, or High Tea" said Mister Tah, with a glance at the clock. "Why don't we break for a few minutes to relax and use the washroom, sip some warm beverages and then reconvene towards 15:30pm? It would give all of us time to destress and be fresher for the next phase of discussions."

Elucubrations and plans

(Phil Lober – Alive)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 15:30pm – High Tea

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Mister Tah frowned as he looked over the assembled people; each was sitting ramrod straight with
both hands around their cup or mug, occasionally sipping from the hot drink of their choice. Small plates of solid food were at hand, taken from the still present buffet cart that, since electrified, had kept everything warm or cold at need. Having chosen the option of getting served in the suite was well thought, but opting for the cart had proven, despite the cost, a practical and economical solution given just how much time was saved by not having to go to and from the restaurant. This was also faster than ordering room service at each occasion one of them was a mite peckish.

Sighing in long suffering patience, the contract expert asked out loud a question that had been niggling at the back of his mind "Tell me, Doctor Wolenczak, what would you be doing if you weren't trying to obtain citizenship in Canada right now? What had been your plans, if you had stayed in Stanford?"

The adolescent was startled out of his serious contemplation on the usefulness of keeping both parents alive and healthy. It had occurred to him just now that he only need keep Cynthia alive enough to testify in court that she could handle her high-functioning very autonomous son without external assistance then they could make an arrangement to live separately. As long as her mind worked at 50 to 60% capacity and her right hand was dextrous enough to sign papers, she would make the lesser evil of two solutions he was faced with and DCFS would be bound by law to accept. The alternative being to eliminate both threats and try his luck with foster care, preferably a group home at his age. Given his massive personal fortune and multiple companies, he would certainly NOT accept any 'nominal legal guardian' since such a person could try to usurp his money, investments and sell off the companies for a quick cash-out that they would steal as well. Not to mention that a 'NLG' could be paid to pimp him off to the UEO Navy or imprison him in a Jesus-camp just like Lawrence was trying to do.

The solution was relatively obvious. And its not like he hadn't done it before, either. The problem was the same as always; Lucas had a better, more evolved sense of family loyalty and belonging than his parents. And, crazy as it sounded, the adolescent really did not want to massacre his own relatives like some cult guru going down the spiral of paranoid self-delusion and familial anihilation. The thought of becoming, devolving his soul and personality, the same way that worshipers of false gods and sects did made his stomach flood with acid enough to sicken him.

The question asked of him startled him out of his ruminations, but it was welcome, indeed.

Taking a sip of coffee and pushing away his empty plate and tableware, the boy gave the three lawyers a calm, probing look-over before answering softly. "I had essentially finished my studies. Those that were critical to my life's work, at any rate. My immediate plans were to pass the quietest winter holidays possible before registering for classes to complete a slow year that I would take as easy as I could to complete my recovery from the ongoing health problems. I was planning on getting a MBA – Mastery of Business Administration – which is basically a lot of book reading and exams, no projects, scaled models or laboratories, so... Easy workload to do at home with an occasional tutor just to check up on my progress. I would have taken a few days after my surgeries in January to visit my home in Buffalo, at Wise Manor, and maybe a layover in New York at the Ramshackle Manor later on, before coming back to San Francisco. I do have to check up on things in person every now and then, you know."

Mister Aylmer said in bland tones "Now that you have been forcibly displaced and changed countries, what are you planning?"

"I just want to be free and safe. If that can happen without hurting anybody, especially me, then so much the better. There are no long term plans at the moment, not until the surgeries in January are done and I have the results in hand. I have a short term plan to rent office space to install a division of Wolenbahn in Canada and prove I am a serious investor to the refugee commission to help along my
candidacy evaluation, but not much else in sight."

Ms Delray gave a tight smile and contributed "Well, we will have to help you get some plans. The more long term strategies you have, the more seriously the immigration committee will take you and that can only help in the long run. Not to mention that having elaborate strategies for augmenting your business will neatly counteract any claims your father has made that your are incapable of handling yourself alone."

Enter the Phoenix Foundation

(MacGyver – main theme 2016)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 15:30pm

Stanford University Hospital; neurology department

Silicon Valley, California, USA

The nurse a the lobby's reception desk looked up from her console as she heard the light footsteps of a new arrival in front of her desk. The young man looked to be in his late twenties or early thirties, fair but lightly tanned skin, short blond hair, the most scintillating green eyes and cute dimples on his cheeks that reminded her of her nephew on his wedding day four years ago. Dressed nicely in khakis, brown checkered flannel shirt and solid brown leather shoes, the man smiled at her in a manner that seemed genuinely friendly.

"Hello ma'am. My name is Angus MacGyver, I work for 'The Phoenix Foundation for scientific development and understanding' in Los Angeles. My employers want to establish a professional meeting with one of your student-doctors in residence, a Doctor Lucas Wolenczak, who works in the psychiatric neurosurgery ward. Would he be available to meet me today or tomorrow?"

The nurse knew full well who the 'Doctor Wolenczak' in question was. Everybody on campus that worked in health sciences, chemistry and electronics knew about him and several of his companies that were hiring straight out of the classrooms based on the individuals' potential rather than diplomas and graduation. The young man's family problems were well known too around the hospital and administration offices, especially the last episode of violence from two years ago. Any questions about him from a newcomer to town was probably not good.

Smiling the universal bland expression of receptionists everywhere, the older woman answered "I am afraid that Doctor Wolenczak is unavailable at the moment. He had to leave town quite suddenly just a few days ago. He is supposed to contact us after the holidays. In January 2021. Can I take a message on your part to hold for him if he calls us? It is the only way to reach him at the moment."

The man blinked his eyes twice slowly as he absorbed the information he was given before asking in a gentle tone "Do you know where, to which city he went? Maybe our Foundation has a divisional office in the area to send the message directly."

Matching the male's gentle but vapid expression, the nurse replied "I am afraid that Doctor Wolenczak has left instructions not to hand out a forwarding address. He is attending to personal necessities therefore he asked Stanford to understand that he needs time to replenish himself before continuing with his most important research projects. We do expect to hear from him in early January at the latest. Can I do anything else for you, sir?"

Tapping the countertop lightly with his hands as he thought for a few seconds, MacGyver shook his head in the negative. "Nope. Thanks a lot, ma'am, I'll report to my employers and let the head office
handle the contact protocols from there on. Have a nice day."

The mature woman watched curiously as the younger man walked from the lobby, going outside the building towards the parking lot. "Contact protocols?" she whispered to herself. That did not sound like the normal speech patterns of a company or medical representative. A soldier or government black-suit trying to be discrete maybe, but not just a tech company wanting to try a quick meet & greet to see how easy to con into a cheap contract the young medical researcher was. Those types of conmen she saw twice a month since she had started working here twenty-four years ago. She worked in a hospital in the best university of the entire north-american West Coast, in the department that dealt with mental illnesses, thus listening to people to discern their problems through garbled communications and crossed signals was her job. And right now, she smelled a rat. Taking the telephone on her desk, she conference-called her supervisor and the director of the Wolenbahn workshops located near campus. They needed to know about this and her doubts.

{ SQ } - { Sniffing around } - { SQ }

Walking slowly out to the sunlit parking lot, Angus watched his surroundings discreetly to make sure he wasn't being followed or observed by a supposed bystander. Old US Army EOD squad training and memories from time serving in the Arabic territories with Jack had taught him to be weary of public places, especially with the list of enemies he had accrued over the years with Phoenix. And now, the bad memories, the souvenirs of things he had seen and done when he still carried a rifle were trying real hard to come out today. He paused by the water fountain to drink a sip and get his bearings.

Leaning against the fountain's cement pedestal with his hip, arms crossed over his chest, Mac thought about the receptionist's demeanor during the short five minutes of conversation. It didn't go well. She had been as unhelpful as a bank clerk repeating confidentiality laws, which was par for the course in hospitals as they had even more stringent laws about patient files. It seemed that the establishment took the privacy of its faculty and students even more seriously than he had been told. A beep sounded from his pants pocket, accompanied by the vibration of his smartphone. He took it out and swiped the screen to accept the incoming call.

"Hello, Mac?" Came the voice of one Jack Dalton, ex Delta Forces infiltration and neutralization specialist. "I'm with Riley here and we got zilch. How 'bout you?"

Angus blinked in surprise at the words. "What do you mean, 'got zilch'? You did go to the operating theater that we were told about following the coma-revival demonstration back three weeks ago, didn't you?"

Jack's deadpan tone came back clearly as the daylight "I mean bro, the entire room is empty, like emptier than a beer fridge after a college football game! And it wan'nt sacked, either. The whole place was disassembled by techs and packed up in a 50 foot ISO cargo module then put on a semi-rig heading for Wolenbahn Electronics Inc on the outskirts of Stanford campus. In case you missed it, that's the place we were at yesterday and their guys told us to come look over here to find our mystery geekazoid extraordinaire. Looks like they were giving us the ole runaround the drain pipe."

Riley's voice came through the phone as she stood next to Jack and he was on speaker-mode. "Yeah, the WEI guys stripped everything out, Mac. I mean, they even took out the rolling tables, the surgery bed, the transparent rolling partition screens, the mobile power regulation modules, the psychotronic CPU core and the neural interface chair... Absolutely everything is gone. I'm surprised they left the paint on the walls or the linoleum on the floors. Whoever gave the orders to pull out, he wanted this as squeaky-clean as the day the hospital was opened, before the gear was installed for service."

Jack added "One of the janitors we spoke to said it happened at night, Wednesday, and the truck left
Thursday morning, meaning yesterday, at around 08:00am. Direction is supposed to be WEI but I have a feeling it wasn't headed there. We haven't called in to Matty yet, we wanted to hack the traffic cams to see if we can spot where the truck went and how far it got before we get her in the loop.

MacGyver looked over the skyline of the buildings, thinking silently as he contemplated the elements of the puzzle. He answered to his teammates "Meet at the van in 10. We're getting back to the hotel and then we call Matty. Riley can hack while you drive, but I'm already sure we won't find anything. Plus, I have a feeling that the staff here will not be any help at all. The secretary in the lobby almost had me in a straight jacket heading for a pickaxe lobotomy in the basement when I asked about the little guy's location. She said they would be contacted in January, no forwarding address."

Riley's voice answered him "Wow! I never thought i'd see the day that Mac got sent packing by a secretary! Din't you 'dimple' that shiny pearly-white smile at her?" she joked at him.

Shaking his head at his friends' ability to take his mind off his failure, the young man replied easily "She was old enough to be my mother. Or my aunt. So no, I smiled but she didn't buy it. She did however give me the feeling that we would not enjoy the consequences if we poke too harshly at the sleeping bear of Stanford U & partners. They got friends and connections all the way to the top of government in several countries; they can fight back dirty if we push too crudely."

Riley snarked gamely "So, we don't send them Jack or Matty, we use me or you, or Bozer in a crunch. That should be easy enough to handle..."

Jack's expletives of protestations were amusing enough but the budding migraine Mac had in the back of his head wasn't letting him any peace. Shutting off the phone, he jogged to the van where he got into a rear seat, belted in and closed his eyes, hoping for at least three minutes of silence until the others arrived. They would meet with Bozer at the motel and take it from there. Hopefully, the boss would order them to pack up and get back to LA so he could get some rest. The last troubles with Murdoch had really done a worse number on him than he had realized. Maybe he should tell Matty. Maybe that young doctor they wanted to contact could have a look at his brain as the test patient to see just how competent he was.

An unwelcome interruption

(Two Steps From Hell – Merchant Prince)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 16:20pm

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Lucas was in the middle of discussing the nitty-gritty of the 'refugee claim process' in Canada and the diverse bureaucrats and elected officials involved with his three lawyers. The level of paperwork and interviews, both private and before public committees, reminded him of Trump's famous 'swamp' and 'deep state' comments during his diverse campaigns. Then, a specific tonality emanated from his smartphone accompanied shortly by another different sound from his laptop on the table. The teenager's face changed to a stony countenance as he turned his portable workstation at an angle so everyone could see the monitor, then tapped the comms suite active in vid-phone mode with all sounds through the speakers so the people around him would hear as well.

"Director Langlois. To what calamity do I owe the call?" the adolescent asked tartly at the man whose face had barely appeared on the screen. He was the head of Wolcenbahn's security division and worked out of the Buffalo facilities not far from the Wise Manor. In fact, Lucas had bought the
land, torn down the decrepit old factory and rebuilt brand new because the emplacement was accessible by the river, through the underground canals or be walked to in less than a half hour, even in the rain. The HQ was where all the human resources issues, accounting and security for WEI were handled along with housing the permanent offices of the Wise Manor – Heritage & Trust lawyers that handled WM and WAC's general business and litigations. The only reason Michel Langlois would call him directly was to report an imminent threat to his person or a mess in progress big enough to require HAZMAT containment or rebuilding a workshop.

"I regret to inform you sir, that another attempt to locate your current locale by external parties has just occurred in Stanford. The personnel at the Psychiatric Neurosurgery ward were very loosely queried whilst a pair of infiltrators were snooping around the operation blocks. A janitor was spotted talking to them before they left. It was the operating theater where you performed the coma-revival procedure three weeks ago, sir. The man at the front desk claimed to be an 'Angus MacGyver' from something called 'Phoenix Foundation' based in LA. They seem to be the same people that visited the San Francisco office on Thursday morning before going to the Stanford campus production lines Thursday late afternoon. Our analysts will soon have confirmation by comparing the camera recordings from the security setups in all locales. As per the procedures you have instituted at the onset of WEI, their faces, bodies and voice prints will be entered in the Cyberghast Hub and distributed to our affiliates ASAP."

Lucas worked his jaw, grinding his teeth a bit as he thought of the situation. He had heard of this 'Phoenix Foundation' and its mysteriously vague works in the last two years. Of late, the Dark Web had been abuzz with rumors around some of their workers. It was just something on the outermost periphery of his awareness, so he never gave it any attention or efforts. Turning his eyes to the lawyers, he asked "Mister Tah, does contact with such R&D foundations not fall under your remit?"

The lawyer nodded once before answering in monotone words "I will of course initiate contacts with them if you wish it. Any information your own security division could provide would greatly cut down on my preliminary digging so I could know what kind of people we are dealing with."

"It's governmental; DARPA or 'black-suit' but we haven't figured out yet which" commented Langlois from the monitor. "The receptionist at SU-H's lobby called in a conference with her boss and our man in the Stanford campus facilities to warn us. She was specific about this detail in the linguistics their doorknocker used when he spoke with her. He said that his employers would handle 'contact protocols' from now on since 'Doctor Wolenczak was out of the area'. That sounds like a soldier reporting or a spook passing the intel along to his handler. No geek, gearhead or squint that I know speaks like that, unless they worked for the 'men-in-black' for 5 years and more."

The teenager took a deep stabilizing breath then ordered "Langlois, have our people dig this like maggots through a carcass until it's picked clean. Then, send it to the CH and I will distribute to the lawyers and a few others. Also, I compiled the basic dossier on the Khunestade Cathedral and their Nazified Viking themed mercenaries. We will have to deal with this, but after the lawyers here have been informed. I need the police forces in both countries to have first dibs on this to build my credibility as a law-abiding citizen and peaceful immigrant before we get involved in the clearing & mopping operations. Also, have you got the dossier on the meaningless little error-of-Nature that I counter-hacked yesterday? Any activity?"

"Very well sir, it will give me time to gather and equip a better team than I thought to be limited to for this kind of work. And, no, Houston is still silent on all fronts."

Gazing at his lawyers interrogatively, the boy got no signals for further questions so he ended the call with his employee and got back to talking about paperwork and bureaucrats. Oh, joy of Joys!
Wilt Bozer walked into the room he and Mac shared to put some take-out food in the mini-fridge for his friend to eat when he woke up from his emergency nap to deal with his migraine. The black male knew full well that it was really bad when the other man took out the pills and icepack to lay down for two or three hours of immediate sleep. Ever since he got drugged out of his brains by Murdoch a few months back, his best friend had been having flashbacks from old missions, varied nightmares and occasional migraines. It was the last symptom that had the team and Matty Webber worried as Mac had never suffered from migraines in his life to date unless it was a result from a concussion but then the peripheral symptoms of that would be present too. No such luck here and it had been quite some time since he'd encountered a head injury or area-effect explosive blast.

Quietly opening then closing the sliding wall partition, Bozer traversed into the other room. This suite was interestingly built as it had two long rooms connected together so that the parents could take one side and the kids be in the other. Each side had a full bathroom and a kitchenette counter with twin-sink, a mini-fridge, an 8 seat table with 8 dingy unpadded chairs, two large double beds and a small sitting area composed of two Lazy Boy sofas, a coffee table and medium-sized flatscreen TV at the front near the entry door and bay window. Add threadbare industrial carpeting and cheap brown drapes in the windows, and that was it. Not in the least a luxury resort, not even what they shared back home him and Mac, but he'd seen worse while traveling on Phoenix missions over the last year.

Jack and Riley shared this room since they were practically family and the young woman saw the older man as a foster father. The fact he had dated her mother 13 years ago and almost married her too meant that after months of working together they had finally finished patching up their problems. As it was, they were actually enjoying a walk down memory lane while each did their basecamp duties until the food arrived. Now that Bozer was here, they would set aside the weapons, maps, paper dossiers and the laptop & antenna setup Riley had been preparing to keep contact with their HQ through the night, just in case Mac's health got worse or they had a break in the trail they were following.

"So Ri, how's tricks? Any leads on that cargo pod with the medical gear?" Bozer asked as he spread out the food containers on the shaky rectangular table. 'The thing must be older than Jack! And a lot less sturdy, too!' he thought amusedly about the oldest member of the team. Sitting himself with his own styrofoam bowl and boxes at the table, he gave Jack a side-look just to see that the older male was coming over to sit as well, with Riley in tow.

Blowing a breath through her mouth, exhaling her annoyance at the situation, the young woman replied tiredly. "Nada, Bose. Ever since yesterday, all I get is either static or false leads to nowhere."

Jack opened the styrofoam bowl to smell the soup inside before grinding some soda crackers into it to thicken the broth a bit. After a few spoons of hot beef & barley had warmed his stomach, he asked the young woman some details. The tech stuff, often enough, just went over his head but she had a way to explain in simple terms that MacGyver rarely managed. "What do you mean static? Your signal seems fine..."

Smirking at her pseudo-dad's lack of tech-savvy, Riley answered back gamely "I don't mean the
connection or strength of the signal, those are fine. No, it's like there's a fog bank between my machine and the rest of the Internex. Even when we stopped at Stanford campus, I tried to link up to their free Wi-Fi hot spots and the linkup was sluggish, about 10% slower than what they advertise it should be and it isn't the only place I had the problem. Even here in the motel, I have a wired link that I hacked into the wall sockets to bypass the pay-meters so I could get the best speed their routers make possible and my machine still seems slow compared to what it was three days ago."

"Did you catch something? A virus or spyware maybe?" Jack asked thoughtfully between spoons of soup as his partner didn't seem to have a clue. If the team's cyber-geek was stumped, they'd have big problems finding the guy they were hunting after, especially if she couldn't find her own answers. It wasn't like Jack himself could do better than hold parts or give pep-talks as she worked her keyboard. Even MacGyver routinely got lost in the virtual wake behind her when she went full-tilt on a hack, so Bozer and him had absolutely no chances of helping.

Riley was stirring her hot soup with a thoughtful look on her face, trying to visualize what she could have missed in the last three days. "I scanned my gear, both laptops and all 3 cellphones, twice already since the first slow-down occurred but I can't seem to put my finger on it. The devices are working fine inside themselves, parts & softwares, and I tested the network signal with completely separate tools, both airwaves and wired versions. The Internex comes in strong and clear. For some reason, when I connect one of my devices to the web, there is a slow-down in the comms linkup management app and only in that specific function. Everything else stays at the same performances."

Bozer shook his head sadly, not able to help. He could understand more of the concepts than Jack and follow her reasoning for a bit longer but couldn't really give any better advice than the eldest member of the team. Plugging stuff without mixing the wires in the wrong devices was pretty much the best he could do when she asked for his help setting up the camp comms.

The sliding wall opened slowly and very quietly as Angus walked through, unsteady on his feet and holding a reusable icepack to the nape of his neck. His face was pallid, his green eyes dull and lightless, and he seemed to have to take one or two seconds at each step to walk without faceplanting in the carpet. This would not be a good night, the other three could tell.

Sitting himself very slowly and very carefully at the table on the nearest empty chair, Angus turned tired eyes towards Riley. "Why'd you bug my phone? Are you afraid I'm gonna disappear? Or was it Matty that told you to do it?" the young man asked tartly.

Narrowing her brown eyes, the surprised woman shook her head in denial, affirming verbally "I haven't bugged you, Mac. I could, and I have when you go missing, like the time Murdoch heisted you off to drug you. I find, scan and activate your phone remotely to locate you and bring help. I don't do this to peep on people and I don't spy on my friends. What made you think that I bugged you, anyways?"

Angus held out his phone to the woman so she could see for herself. "Cuz it's been set to synchronize with my laptop, which I keep home and never bring on missions, and also, like, NEVER put Phoenix stuff on it. Especially after all the break-ins we had, like Murdoch among others. I have always kept all mission briefs and research on the phone or at HQ in my office. I never bring those things home even when I'm sick. Operational security and all that rot they trained us for at boot camp. So who other than you could have hacked in and programmed the synch function to link with a CPU that isn't even here to connect with?"

Taking about two minutes to fiddle with the device, the team's hacker began to swear in quite imaginative words that had Jack wince through his wide smile at a few whilst Bozer and Mac had amused expressions. After another five minutes, the girl handed back the phone with a pained set to
her face. "Let's eat, then I have some work ahead of me for the entire evening. I know how we got hacked. And it was a hack, I just didn't see it pass through. Bloody first time that I see THIS done, too!"

Bozer clicked on the TV to CNN; even if it served just as a background noise, it would make a distraction while they ate. At least that was the idea until he saw the headline titles being announced before the first batch of ads ran. "Eh, guys, I think I found us our medical genius. He's in Canada somewhere."

Jack turned to him, curiosity written on his face, to comment "Bose, man, you just got here! How in tarnation do you find a missing teenage kid in under 10 minutes like that?"

Seeing the faces of the other two teammates expressing the same question, the cinematics and makeup specialist pointed at the wall-mounted TV. "That could be cuz he's on international news feeds, right about now. Turn around and look, the story's coming up!"

The announcer on the CNN Washington DC newsroom floor was starting up the report with two large pictures behind him on the massive projection monitor: the juvenile prodigy of medicinal and cybernetic sciences DR. Lucas Wolenczak DP, MD, PhD, and the UEO flagship SeaQuest – DSV 6000. Inside of 5 minutes, the gist of the story was out in the open, streaming to billions of households, restaurants, companies and law enforcement agencies across the planet.

The UEO Navy had made a secret deal to enslave a child aboard their ship to avoid paying him for his work, this at the request of a violent, murderous father who wanted his adolescent son to be destroyed by the sailors and killed off during an armed conflict with 'something nasty' as he had commanded.

Then the film of when Lawrence attacked Lucas at the hotel 2 years ago, as filmed by the safety recorders the boy had hidden in his clothing, was played out, at full length, including the segments in the corridor.

After that, clips from the recording of the conversation between Lucas, Lawrence and lieutenant Denalt was played, using those excerpts to further prove the immorality and depravity of Lawrence as well as demonstrate the exact 'why' that was behind placing Lucas on a warship.

After the eye-searing presentation of familial violence came the panel of commentators from diverse branches of law enforcement and two judges from America and Canada, a spokesperson from the ACLU and a representative from the secretariat of Justice for the UEO. It didn't take more than 5 minutes to prove there was consensus that, under established and settled law in all member states of the UEO Treaty, the maneuver attempted by Lawrence Wolenczak against his child was illegal. There were no known exceptions, nor any manner in which the UEO, USA and other nations would tolerate or let pass such a depravity.

Then the discussion moved on to the young medical expert's active flight to Canada, his request for 'refugee status' and his added long-plan request for 'investor immigrant' status as well as a brief overview of the eye-popping personal and corporate wealth he had amassed since age 9 when he founded the Wolenbahn Electronics International company.

Again, the consensus was quickly confirmed that the boy had every right to remove his person from the place of danger and seek rescue and support where he would be cared for safely. As far as the experts could determine, Lawrence had already been declared an unfit parent by court decree 12 years ago. He should never have had custody of the child transferred back to him anyways, therefore
he should not have a claim on the youth from then on to begin with.

Then the panel of pundits turned to the toxic thorny issue of the White House Cabinet being involved in the deal that was to see the injured, damaged teen enslaved aboard SeaQuest. They established a rapid agreement that the POTUS seal-of-office came with signature serial numbers unique to each dossier they were stamped on to back-trace each use of the seal. As such, it was proven that the seal on the printed versions of the orders that were sent to the ship's officers, civilian hirelings and external contractors were genuine. That could only mean that President Donald J. Trump had authorized the illegal, immoral kidnapping, enslavement and torture of a child for no discernable reason other than 'he made a good deal with Lawrence'.

Switching channels to give other news programs a quick peek, the team saw that it had exploded across the TV-scape and every station was running a segment about it. This mess was planetary and not going anywhere. Even Fox News was having patently obvious problems coming up with a justification or excuse as to HOW or even WHY such a situation could be morally acceptable, especially given the father's destructive violent attitude against his son.

Curious about this development to their mission but hungry, the team concentrated on their food while it was still warm except for MacGyver who decided to go take a shower and lie down for a healing nap again. He would eat later when the migraine's worst effect were passed and the pills were no longer stewing in his stomach. Grabbing the soda crackers that the others wouldn't eat, he munched those with some water as the shower ran itself to the proper warmth.

A slow, healing bout of hydrotherapy had him in a much better mood, especially after letting the warm water spray on his aching head and nape for about 20 minutes. Feeling properly sleepy, he slid his fleece lounge pants back on then lied down in bed under the sheets with the lights closed. The others would wake him around 23:00pm, in time for the call-in to HQ before the final checkups and their own bedtime. At that point, he would be able to browse the web to do some quiet research on their query with minimal pain in his head or eyes by keeping most of the lights closed. Bozer was used to his nightly work habits so he would not be bothered, as long as there was no music or strong noise.

Finally alone

(SeaQuest – season 1 – opening theme)

Friday 18th of December, 2020; 18:45pm

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Lucas sat on the large sectional couch in the living room of the suite, on the right lounging wing near the hearth, with both legs elongated before him so that the heat waves could gently massage his aching knee joints. Eyes closed with all lights shut off, the boy was trying to regulate his breathing to achieve a state of calm so he could stabilize his stomach enough to keep down his evening meal.

The events of the day were finally catching up to him emotionally, after the physical tiredness.

The preliminary meeting with the attorneys had gone better than he expected on the technical side of things but also much worse on the emotional side. He had exposed himself publicly to people he didn't know anything about and that risk was very nearly unacceptable. Now, they knew things about his character, temperament and methodologies that nobody ever had before. They would have to disappear quickly if they ever decided to put that knowledge to work against his health and plans.
Keeping his eyes closed, the adolescent took a deep breath, exhaling it slowly as he tried to let himself mentally flow along the events of the day's end.

At around 17:30pm the lawyers had needed to leave to reach their office to deposit all the accumulated evidence and manuscript notes taken during the day. They also had to call in some researchers and junior lawyers to help with multiple 'detail' analysis and research that would need to be done during an emergency night shift to prepare the next meeting scheduled to occur on Sunday afternoon. Finding workers still available for emergency shifts at this time of the year, especially at night, would be nigh on impossible but the overtime and rush-job fees the adolescent had offered for the one-time event could make them decide in his favor.

After the three adults had left, Lucas had gone to the bathroom to splash some warm water on his face to help relax himself from all the accrued stresses of the day. Then he had used the still present buffet cart to plate up an early dinner composed of a fully dressed Friday-club sandwich, spicy potatoes, caesar salad and a fruit juice to change the taste from so much sugary coffee all day long. The meal had been easy to assemble from the already cooked parts. Fortunately for the culinarily challenged teen, he just needed to toast his bread then apply butter, mustard, eggs, bacon, cheese slices, tomatoes and lettuce, then put his sides in bowls, and he was ready for a relaxing snack in front of the TV to watch the news.

Snort! - He had completely forgotten the biggest piece he had put on the gameboard.

So much for being a multi-genial super-prodigy with a 94.7% recall eidetic memory!

Sighing in deep annoyance at yet another mistake he made, the teen just ended up laughing at the memory of how he had almost choked on his grape juice when he turned on the 18:00pm news on CNN only to see his own sickly thin, pallid face as the lead story of the show. They even got his many titles right, for once in his life. Then the announcer gave the basic outline of the case with enlarged snapshots of the written orders from the White House Cabinet as proof the story was absolute truth. Those documents had been recovered by NCIS from the offices of the senior officers, civilian workers and even the company or university reps in charge of research projects. The FBI had gone to the White House with a federal warrant to obtain the originals from the Presidential Archive where they were stored until the seated president left office to be replaced by the next. The documents were there, sealed and signed manually by D.J. Trump who had even admitted to it plainly as if the entire situation was being overblown. To the geriatric crud's eyes, it was 'just a little side-deal between friends'.

Defective bastard!

The documents showed clearly that Lawrence had intended to dump 'custodial legal guardianship' of his son on everybody & anybody above age 21 who was to serve aboard. These documents were analyzed by DCFS and the US Department of Justice experts who all concurred that even a cursory examination showed them to be completely illegal, thoroughly immoral and not binding since Lawrence never had them emitted by a seated judge or DCFS officials. The Presidential Seal on them did not in any way make them legal or binding either. The established law did not grant the president ANY authority over child custody and placement in the USA, nor could he force the military to take a child for 'redressment'. Furthermore, there was no law in the USA that allowed a father to spread guardianship of a child to an entire community, like a cult, even less when the members of the group were not identified, had not been vetted by DCFS and the group was 'fluctuating' with the passage of transitory, temporary persons. Handing 'custodial care' to a boarding school was legal because the school had a permit and inspections, the teachers were licensed and inspected, and the personnel could not in any way forcibly convert a child nor take over his finances and life out of the school's territory.
Then, CNN's announcer played the fight films from the hotel on TV; both his safety recorder and the security cameras from the building showed in gory, unvarnished details just WHAT and WHO the man called Lawrence Wolenczak was. The fact it showed Lucas throwing an acid capsule in his own defense was presently glossed over, but he knew that event would come back to haunt him, especially in court.

Then some chosen bits of the three-way fight between Denalt, Lawrence and him had been played, giving the world a deeper, more revealing, glimpse of his family dynamics.

The fact that all the pundits on the CNN discussion panel, governmental and social activists alike, had agreed immediately about the depravity and unfitness of his parent was a boon, yes, but not binding in court nor did it affect the refugee claims committee and the rest of the immigration process. It simply gave him some thin cloak of legitimacy in the court of Popular Opinion, but not much else. At the very least, the splash-around effect of this would cover Lawrence, his workers, his contractors, all his personal friends and eventually the political supporters he had acquired along the years. The public pressure would make certain the investigation stayed open and public instead of being handled behind closed doors in the basement of a church somewhere like the defunct parent had hoped to do. It might even be enough to insure that nobody in any of the US military services would ever want Lucas inside their ship, base or building, regardless of reasons and orders.

Finding that he had nothing in his mind that was pressing, he swallowed passed the lump of accumulated stress in his throat and tried to wriggle himself more comfortably in the couch cushions.

"Alexa! Activate living room TV."

The adolescent opened his weary eyes to watch the screen, hoping to find – anything – to take his mind off the week he had to endure. Given it was a Friday evening, it could still happen.

{(SQ)} - { Second present of Christmas unwrapped } - { SQ }

(18:59pm)

Lucas closed the TV with a – Snort! – of disgust. Everything was either christmassy or useless reruns he had seen several times over the years already. Finding that there was nothing of any interest to watch all night, even the Friday night special offered on diverse channels between 19:00pm and 23:00pm, the boy decided to do something both useful and relaxing for him.

It was time to unlimber and activate the second portion of the Cyberghast Hub.

Gathering his portable workstation, smartphone and meta-glasses from the dining table, the teen hobbled on his cane and stiff legs over to the office doors to access the heart of his cybernetic web of control and espionage. He would use the opportunity to survey his bot-net and the watchtowers he had set on sentry duty over critical threats. After that, he might have some time to do a survey of his companies and the deployment of investments in Europe that he had ordered to offset the risks presently dogging him in North America presently.

Passing through the complex lock on the double doors, he went to the active console to set in place his portable devices in their connection slots to synchronize securely with the CH & bot-net. After waking up the Cyberghast's admin & sys-op module, he carefully positioned the secondary transport caisson on the left side, near the entry of the room, with the handlebar towards the sys-op module and three feet of space between the two machines. Then, Lucas passed through the same complex opening of pannels and automated hydraulic pistons as he had done with the first CH module. Now that the transport crate was stabilized and unveiled, he pulled some multi-layered anti-electricity/magnetism gloves from the CH admin module and a set of complex keys from another
cubby. He had almost 20 minutes of manipulations to unspool power cables and network wires that connected Module #2 to the CH admin module. Then he unspooled a secondary kit of cables and wires that would connect Module #2 to the wall sockets to bring in the electricity, telephony and Internex to the dedicated work-horse.

The goal was to create a localized network to spread both electricity and data throughout the room by multiple sockets and ports to allow the machinery to automatically select the least occupied connection when doing complex, heavy jobs that had priority over the maintenance tasks that ran in the background. Also, with multiply redundant wires and cables, it made disconnecting the modules quickly nigh on impossible and since each linkup was armored and shielded with sensor wire twisted around the main conductor element, any removal or damage to the cabling would trigger alarms and the defenses built into the mobile hub caissons.

NOBODY would steal or hack Lucas' primary work tools and go away unpunished.

Now though, the boy was opening his second box of male to play with it.

The Cyberghast ECB – Echo-Cloaking Broadcaster; the data mining, number crunching, electronic warfare wellspring of virulation, malwares and dispersion of misinformation, lies, propaganda and social-media-vectorized character assassination. The dolly-portable equivalent to the Aegis-destroyer for the Virtual World. And it wasn't the only one he owned. Many were installed in permanent locations in his homes, offices and manufactures. Others were mobile in vehicles like the flying boat, the private train, the four service boats he bought this year and several semi-trucks rolling in seemingly random patterns around North America.

The ECB was a custom-built system of CPU's that no one else on the Earth had. It was composed of several motherboards & chipsets of crystalline psychotronic technology all tied together by the neuroplexic programming Operating System created with Base 3-13-39 mathematics that Lucas had invented back at age 8. The entire system was completely proprietary and optimized to be configured and controlled by the Neural Interface that he had purpose-built for just this warfare management task.

It was incredibly hard to evaluate the system's capacity in terms of today's technology since it worked along the same principals as a human brain and could actually reach a significant percentage of the organ's raw speed and processing potential. There was also the fact that the smaller, portable versions were much more limited by how little electricity and network signal they could process given that the locales were not designed and built with their specific necessities in mind. The bigger permanent versions installed in Buffalo, New York, Cambridge and the partially completed computational hubs in Sault-Sainte-Marie (Ontario), Copper Harbor (Michigan), Clough Island near Duluth (Wisconsin) and Mission Island in Thunder Bay (Ontario) were all purpose-built and had exponentially larger capacities.

Making a face of annoyance, Lucas thought a few seconds about just how big his nascent industrial and cybernetic empire was getting. He'd have to sleep in the damned neural interface to get it all done on time and proper order.

Now that the system was deployed, he could pull out from one of the cubbies in the sys-op module the portable NI headset, which was a bigger version of the meta-glasses he usually wore but capable of connecting with his neural pathways on his head through crystalline induction plates implanted at his temples and nape of the neck. Additional less annoying connectors had been installed at the lowest point of the upper arms just above the elbows to allow wired-links without having his head encased in heavy systems all day. The vocal command application in the CH-ECB was also far superior to the glorified 'Alexa' on steroids that was lodged in the CG-adm module.
Once fully wired and seated in his plush chair, the teenager began to take care of his bot-net, multiple businesses and move pieces on the gameboard to ensure his safety in the coming weeks so that he could go to the hospital in January in peace.

{ SQ } - { What a web I weave } - { SQ }

The old prototype oil-fired steam-engine floatplane was in Buffalo (New York) finishing its resupply before it would head out to a secret hiding place that Lucas had selected last year. A rental boat hangar in Highlands (New Jersey) directly on the Atlantic Ocean's shoreline that was paid for out of an anonymous account to diffuse the money trails. The moment the plane was located in its hangar, the building would be winterized, locked down and sealed with only Lucas having all the keys to undo the protection scheme that would deter theft and curiosity away from his escape route.

Well, one of them, anyways.

The private train convoy, the venerable antiquated 'The Briary', had left Bramble Manor in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and made good time up north to Canada and Quebec city from where it would take a set of seldom used private cargo railways along the back country forests of the St-Laurent Valley's northern shore. These tracks would lead all the way up to the north-eastern village of Rivière St-Paul, in the Province of Quebec where an old train equipment maintenance workshop was located. As it so happened, it had been built and furnished to repair steam engines for trains, boats, mining shovels and similar systems of the early 1900's. It was abandoned in the early 1960's when diesel engines became less expensive and more reliable than the old steamers being replaced all over the continent. Since 'The Briary' was a unique prototype of so-called 'modern steam' train engineering, it had made sense for the teenager to buy this discrete locale that was cheap despite still being well furnished with industrial gear he needed to repair the vehicle in case he had to go to ground for a long term. A discrete private contract under an anonymous company had seen the workshop opened, cleaned, restocked and all utilities reconnected with extra gear installed as per the teen's needs inside of six months. The bolt-hole for his precious train had been ready for a little over three years now and it would be put to good use until he could take out the convoy in public again.

Lucas was becoming quite attached to his ancestors' old things and didn't want to risk either parents trying to steal or destroy them if it could be avoided. Therefore, the adolescent had been slowly but methodically preparing caches for his most important assets since he reached Stanford. That program of preventive acquisitions and renovations was now paying off.

There were the four new boats, all of them 200 feet long ocean faring ships of the 'rescue & technical assistance' kind that had been acquired just last February of this year. They were kept separately in Sidney Mines (Nova Scotia), Copper Harbor (Michigan), Monterey (California) and Cameron Parish (Louisiana). They had all been reconditioned to the specs that Lucas needed to live aboard despite his leg injuries and limited wheelchair access by the same shipyard where he had bought the matched set during the liquidation of a bankrupt oil platform repair company following the 2019 tornadoes.

The boats were kept in their flaky paint, rusted hull appearance to deter thieves and snoopers from paying attention to the high tech comms equipments, new living quarters, new full med-bay and a pair of new crane arms usually found on large tow-trucks capable of moving wrecked semi-rigs and buses. The hulls had been cut and hinged to create a reliable sea-gate with moon pool, ceiling winches, diving cage, hyperbaric chamber and a rack with eight underwater drones to scan the hull and subsurface conditions in shallow waters. A rack with eight aerial drones would establish a mid-range defensive perimeter whether in dock or on the waves. Each boat had received a custom-designed mobile version of the Cyberghast Hub in its complete permanent four-module form.

Finally, Lucas gave a superficial look at his closest bolt-hole he could reach in case of emergency
evacuation. It was near Edmonds, 12 miles north of Seattle in Washington State; the unnamed? Manor that had been built there, right on top of Shell Creek, accessible by Melody Road. His great-grandfather had constructed the plot of land on the same layout of 3,000 x 3,000 feet with a huge manor, two great workshops with a boat & floatplane hangar near it and a private railway spur leading to all the shops and docks whilst ¾ of the land was farmed or decorative gardening. This was the last such great estate he had built, in the late 1960's before he pulled away from the public eye to become reclus in Buffalo and his subsequent disappearance in 1970.

Supposedly, the austere, arrogant man had built three more such 'Old Glories' in more remote areas that were now being reached by civilization, if barely. Even prolonged observation films and research through the channels Lucas could hack in corporate or military satellites did not give anything probant on those sites. Built in the 1940's during the World War II frenzy of industrialization, their weird construction and heavily bunkerized nature would have passed under all radars, especially since nobody had reliable cameras or the Web to do multiples searches and correlations of disparities and patterns as were now available even to newbies.

Th first terrain was in Florida's southern most regions, in the Keys. Most specifically in Key Largo's central mass, on Jewfish creek. The large plot of land allowed to pass boats either by the creek going south then the Blackwater Sound or going north through Barness Sound, then Card Sound then the open Atlantic Ocean. The domain had a private railway spur still in place and seemingly well maintained, while regular road access was done through Overseas Highway and a private road through the swampy land. The land had the usual, large, multi-wing manor with two great workshops and a vehicle hangar for boats, floatplanes and the train convoy. As normal, ¾ of the land was reserved for farming and gardening but presently just overgrown wild greenery that climbed up the buildings so bad that it hid them from sight.

The second phantom estate was located at the northern tip of the Bahia Grande lake, near Port Isabelle in Cameron County, Texas, near East Ocean Boulevard. It was accessible through the Atlantic Ocean and subsequent rivers until the Bahia, the Boulevard and float-plane. This one's railway line seemed to have been swallowed by the swampy forests along the years but it still showed on the scans and films as if it were complete and solid, just covered in green crud. It bore investigation.

The third terrain was located in San Diego, California, at the junction between the Oneonta Slough and the Tijuana River. It was straddling the meeting point of the two streams and had the Pacific Ocean as its western border while accessible by Tower Road or Boundary Road, the ocean docks, the rivers and float-plane. The private rail tracks that were visible on the satellite films seemed slightly overgrown but still usable as-is.

Lucas would have to do a search to see if any maintenance contracts had been paid for somehow to keep the railways, roads and canals operable during the estates' hibernation period. That seemed exactly like the sort of thing F. would have done. The man had written several times that he absolutely HATED not having a house, vehicle or workshop in proper functioning order when he needed it for an experiment or project. Getting a 'right-of-way' railway construction company to clear out, inspect and renovate the private tracks should not be complicated nor too costly given that there wasn't that much mileage to repair and redo all the electronic signals & cameras up to the teen's specifications.

A nice little side-project to add on the list.

Supposedly, if the manuscript notes of his ancestor were to be trusted, all 'Manorial' properties were designed and set to have a standard gauge private railway spur coming unto the plots of land, just like the Wise, Bramble and Ramshackle manors had been built. The other private residences in other
towns were large and opulent but had never had the terrain needed to support workshops and rail service, so the train systems were set to be used out of the nearest Wise Apothecary production or distribution facility if any was nearby.

This meant that Lucas had several usable safe-houses in his hands that nobody knew about, including his lawyers or employees back at WEI and WAC. That meant he could go to ground in any of these massive old piles of steel and bricks with some food reserves, medicines, clothes and a few burn phones to stay up to date on the outside world and he would be off-grid and untraceable for the very long run.

After perusing his other less glorious - meaning cheaper and smaller – properties and vehicles, the adolescent dove into the minutiae of a recent Web Tier-2 security protocol upgrade that the US Central Mint wanted reviewed and corrected since their initial contractor had done a quick & dirty job of it that simply wasn't satisfying. It would be his first piece of work for them and he didn't know their habits or reliability but The World Bank had accepted to act as guarantor of the transaction as a known friend of both sides. It was just a paltry 3 million dollars and should take all of 17 hours to complete. If he did it on the hand-brakes, without pushing himself. Or he could push, do it in about 8 hours and move on to something else more – titillating – for his mind. Oh, well... Being workaholic had its benefits sometimes and he did 'need' the legally traceable cashflow to prove he really was a decent, reliable investor to justify his welcome into the host country.

As he planned his evening workload, Lucas told himself with a playful smirk that he didn't need to get Hanukah or Christmas presents from anybody. He was rich enough to just buy the gifts, and the stores that sold them, by himself if he really wanted those items. It wasn't a very cheery holiday-like thought, but it was amusing to his gallows' humor anyways.

And wasn't that a declaration on the health of his mindset.

In the next chapter we have the whole bloody mess exploding in public, several Agencies in the Washingtonian Alphabet Soup gearing up and the old biddies come out of retirement to save the country and Free World they sacrificed so much to build and protect. Admiral Noyce, the SeaQuest and its crew make their grand appearance on the gameboard while the White House tries to play the wounded party despite being fully exposed as criminals and bereft of credible allies.

Lawrence Wolenczak and Cynthia Holtzenstein will be put in the Eye of Public Opinion and the beginning stages of their Fall are seen.

This chapter will actually have little about Lucas himself except in mentions and references as it concentrates on the plethora of other actors involved in the cataclysmic events caused by the unveiling of the criminal situation.
The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } - { WARNING } - { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

From now on, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours as well as Western Africa.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

FIFTH CHAPTER; SpIES, TRADECRAFT & Antechambers

Cynthia and Lawrence; blame game

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 00:27am (midnight)

Eastern America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 17:27pm
The young male secretary swallowed hard as he marched rapidly from the staff break-room towards the office of the founding partner of the firm. The 'Lady' Cynthia Lydia Wise Holtzenstein, Esq., specialist of criminal law, criminology and especially mafia and organized crime. As in, she had a slew of friends and 'contacts' in the mafia and the underworld all around the states of New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Maine. The woman was well known inside the walls of the company as being not that stable, and honestly, not all 'there' in the head, even though she was a brilliant attorney.

Given the relationships she had in the seedy lower classes of society, being a capable pleader was pretty much a necessity of her life. Unfortunately, it also meant she had a notable tendency to bullshit people all day long and punctually threaten them with bodily harm... Just because... It was even more unfortunate that the young man had friends in those very same 'less rich' layers of Buffalo since he went to Law School and his personal contacts had confirmed to him that this woman had a nasty temper and she did in fact hire out arm-twisters to cause damage when challenged.

Pausing in front of the desk of the senior secretary that acted as gatekeeper for the founding boss, he nodded politely at the older, mature woman and told her quietly that he had an emergency that concerned the 'Lady' personally therefore needed to meet her immediately, regardless of her schedule or the fact she was actually packing her office for a month long vacation. It was well known their employer had planned to go to her horse farm in Vermont from tomorrow morning until mid-January and she would not appreciate being delayed right on the cusp of her departure.

The office manager touched a key on her telephone to beep her boss and ask for the audience. Getting a prompt answer, she gestured at the young adult to send him in quickly. Whelming his courage, the junior secretary walked in and closed the door behind him, going so far as to engage the lock to insure privacy. It would not help the health of anybody to walk in during this conversation.

The woman in question was standing near the built-in units on the office's outer wall, a new cup of piping hot coffee in hand whilst she was rapidly swiping and tapping at her tablet that lay flat on the counter near the coffee maker and condiment basket. She was standing in front of the large picture window that dominated that part of the office, giving light over the counters, built-ins and small meeting table with four chairs and low coffee table. Raising her head to gaze predatorily at her young subordinate, she exposed fully her face, showing off the ivory-white skin, ice-blue eyes and spun-gold hair that made many people think of her as a young north-European princess from the Baltic countries rather than the 47 year old mature jewish-born dame from Buffalo. A misconception she had always actively encouraged in everyone that met her, regardless of the reason for the encounter. Cynthia was vain, prideful, mercurial and very much despised being associated with anything other than the 'winning' race and culture of present-day American society and politics.

"Yes, Francis, what is it that you risk your position in the firm for it by coming to interrupt my last hours of solace in the seclusion of my demesne?" She queried, with the specific mixture of threats, rare words and snobbish sneering tone she used to impress on people just how inferior and menial they were when in her august presence. That such presence was both a blessing and a boon on their dismal lives was also strongly suggested, to the point she took offense quite easily if you didn't respond adequately with submissiveness and solicitude towards her personal needs, unless of course if you were a Don or 'Lord' of the underground. Big OLD Name, Power and Money, in that order; those were the only things that Cynthia considered or craved, because she could wield them to obtain
the respect and social status she thought she deserved.

The 22 year old didn't even try to make the usual fake-charming smile and pretty-boy routine that insured he was at least tolerated in the founding partner's presence. Her habit of judging young men as much on their appearance and servileness as by their competences and utility was an established fact in the entire company, even though she never made a single move to 'claim' them as playthings. Smoothing down the front and lower hem of his waistcoat, the male justified himself quickly, knowing his lack of reason could mean a dismissal notice on his desk before the end of the day. That was not the Yuletide gift he wanted to get.

"My apologies for bothering you, madam. Taking the precious time of a founding partner is not something that I attempt just for chumming up to the higher-ups, Ma'am. I finish work tonight at 20:00pm because I want to close the research for the Lascow case before I go on vacation. So, I was in the break-room having my dinner early while looking at the TV when CNN's preview of their 6 o'clock news passed, forcing me to pay attention and then come warn you in earnest. Ma'am, they're going to run a story about your son and ex-husband on national prime-time news. With films, Ma'am, many films, mostly about the attack and injuries that Mr Lawrence inflicted on the boy, back two years ago."

Walking briskly to the wall that was the farthest away from her majestic mahogany desk and the meeting quad, the woman stood before the 3 feet tall by 6 feet wide Internex-enabled conference grade monitor and called out loud for the device to activate. The vocal processor triggered the screen to light up, going to the local Buffalo station until she asked specifically for "CNN channel, New York city time zone." and the device complied.

After watching a few minutes of the current program, the channel cycled through another bevvy of ads, then showed the preview of its 6 o'clock lead stories again. The woman saw the thirty seconds of film and verbal commentary to explain to viewers what the story was about and she almost dropped her cup of coffee to the expensive imported carpet. As it was, the mature woman backed away from the screen to sit in one of the closest sofas in the conversation space and found she needed the warmth of that coffee to steady her nerves and restore heat to her shaking limbs. Her bastard child had escaped up north to Vancouver in Canada while dropping several tons of files and films on dozens of governmental agencies and child-protection groups.

"Get out and lock the door on the way. Tell Juntha to cancel anything left on my schedule for the evening and call the limousine driver to come up to the break-room. He is to stay there until I call for him to drive me home later after I'm done here. Go. Now!"

Not waiting for anything else in case it could cause his dismissal or demotion, the young man speed-walked out of the richly appointed office, locking the door upon passing it. He gave the instructions to Juntha Merghest, the office manager, and quickly retreated back to the break-room to finish his meal and stay away from angry employers on the warpath. He really wasn't high enough on the totem pole to survive this kind of shitstorm if the rabid woman decided to vent her spleen on his poor hide. And the worst thing of the whole situation was that the TV's in the break-room would all be on CNN and within an hour, the entire firm would be aware. When he had left the room before, several other people were calling or texting their friends to warn them to watch the story. Nothing would stop this anymore.

{ SQ } - { Conjugal communications } - { SQ }

(Western Africa 00:46am)

(Eastern America 17:46pm)
"Alexa! Dial the vidphone; Lawrence Wolenczak, emergency line." Cynthia called out to empty air as she raised to walk before the large wall-mounted monitor again. It was passed midnight over on the west coast of Africa near Cape Town where the World Power Project was located but her ex-husband would want to hear of this. Of course she knew what he had been plotting in that disjointed, amateurish way of his, but for once he had involved enough external people that it should have balanced out his natural ineptitude at criminal endeavors to make it work.

The monitor was presently showing a green & blue world map with the time zones inscribed in glowing golden lines, the locations of herself and her destination party highlighted in red with the hour, coordinates, building address and name of auditor next to the dots. After barely two rings sounding out from the speakers, the image switched over as the line was accepted to live contact. Lawrence was seated in his office, at his large desk, an ugly steel contraption of the post-industrial chic style that made Cynthia want to vomit every time she saw it.

The appearance of his face, destroyed by Lucas during their fight 2 years ago then rebuilt by expensive plastic surgeries since, also made her sick. The doctors at the private hospital in the Swiss Alps had been top notch but they couldn't truly rebuild the features completely as they were. Lucas had put in his acids and poisons a 'marking agent' that discolored the skin while preventing clean manageable scarring in such a way that there were several thick long scars running all over the man's head, shoulders, left arm and torso like the crudely stitched seams of a Frankenstein-type monster from a B-series horror movie. The left eye was brown but not the exact shade as the right one since the 'donor' didn't have the same coloration, nor a healthy life. Her contacts told her it came from a drunken Russian sailor who was forced to give it up in payment for his debts to the Bratva, the Russian mafia. Her contacts would know, since it was by them, and through her passing orders along, that Lawrence purchased the replacement eye and the sections of clear Caucasian white skin that were grafted onto the acid-burned, necrotic areas of his person.

He was a fully functional male, but looked only passable, not aesthetically pleasing as he had when they were young and fooled themselves into thinking they could have a paper wedding to boost their careers without bothering or becoming injurious to each other. What fools they had been, at that age. Foolish, and imbued of their own self-righteous importance, too. Cynthia could only breathe in relief that Lucas was no longer in her life. Unlike his father, the boy was frightfully intelligent, monstrously competent and had a cruel streak that even Lawrence could not even dream about whelming in this lifetime.

After some ten seconds of mutual observation to subliminally gauge and intimidate each other, the damaged, depraved man spoke out in a clear albeit rasping voice. "What do you want, woman?" He droned out with a sneer in his voice that wasn't visible on his face as he maintained the usual unmoving façade he adopted when dealing with his family and relatives. "It's past midnight in WPP. I know that I regularly retire past 02:00am because of the constant flow of communications that NCQ asks to be on their clock, despite the damnable time zones, but it's not an excuse for YOU."

"Shut your trap for a few seconds, eunuch! Then I will tell you what happened to make me scupper the beginnings of my Christmas vacations by suffering your displeasing countenance." His ex-wife replied in her expected venomous, snobby accent and words. "Your damnable procreate has gone and put himself on CNN's national broadcast! He is their 6 o'clock lead story! With films about the hotel fight at Stanford, 2 years ago! If you value your intricately patterned hide, you will make time to set your mismatched dichotomic gaze upon this conflagration and resolve it before it destroys BOTH of us. That you march to your demise is neither surprising nor disappointing, Lawrence, as it has become the expected standard of your total capabilities. That the catastrophic results of your ineptness should be allowed to stain my reputation and drag MY name and firm into this miasma will not be permitted."
After taking a pull on her coffee cup long enough to drain it, she set cup, saucer and napkin on the low cupboard counter that ran beneath the monitor to free her hands. She was always more expressive and therefore more effective as an orator with her hands mobile. Looking into the heinous muddy-brown eyes of her divorced partner, Cynthia pointed with an accusatory index finger right between the cold calculating eyes that followed her every movement as their owner prepared to verbally attack.

"Don't, Lawrence. Don't even try, or think of trying. You know full well the extensive ramifications of my international webs of contacts and contractors, as you benefited from them for your 'rejuvenation cure' in the last two years. You know that my words and orders carry a weight of authority that you are not even capable of comprehending, let alone mobilizing on your end. Threaten ME, little man, and you will know the cold kiss of steel at your neck before our son's next anniversary rings in the rebirth of that idiotic divinity that you supposedly 'converted' to last year. Imbeciles like Trump may buy your serpent oil, but I know better, darling; I know you. Settle your situation with Lucas WITHOUT involving my name, firm or reputation, or I will remove you from the gameboard and negotiate lasting peace with the REAL power behind the Wolenczak name and estates."

Ignoring the congested look and grinding teeth that Lawrence displayed as the childish lack of control it was, Cynthia spoke out to empty air. "Alexa! Disconnect call." Turning her back on the blanked out monitor that was immediately back to sleep mode, the 47 year old woman marched to her desk to call in a meal from the private kitchen they had in-house to supply buffet-style service during long conferences and all-nighters on big cases. The cooks were busy as tonight was supposed to be the last work day before Christmas with only two days for junior researchers and assistants in between Yule and New Year's Day just to come in to deal with calls and mail. Many people in the company were doing long hours tonight to clear out their in-box or finish grave dossiers so they could go to their winter pause with their minds at peace. The cooks would therefore have a large selection already done and warm, ready to garnish the break-room buffet counters or send to the executive offices like hers.

Her meal ordered, Cynthia palmed her face for a few seconds to steady herself then quickly walked back to the monitor to pick up her empty cup so she could refill and set herself at her desk, taking great pains to look unruffled and unimpressed by whatever CNN would spew out about her son and his father. Her total disconnection from Lawrence several years ago was public knowledge, as was the fact she had dumped Lucas on him and reneged the little sewer-dwelling rodent six years ago. While her experience told her she was un-attackable on the legal side, she knew all too well the way that character assassination and the politics of personal destruction worked in Washington DC and on the international level. She was lucky that Lawrence was a rank amateur at such mind games, but bitched mentally at the reality of just how truly capable her adolescent son was in that arena. That, his personal affinity for social medias, communications by remote devices, and the fact that his companies shared a litigation department that was well staffed, bigger than her firm (curses!) and better financed because he had so many different revenue streams to bring in money to constantly replenish his war chest.

No, Cynthia wasn't dumb enough to get caught in a conflagration between Lucas and his father. Tapping a finger to the pull-out touchscreen set in the thickness of her desk in front of her, she caused a 24 inch wide flat-screen to raise from the far rim of the furniture, giving her a beautiful working monitor with touchscreen and voice command abilities. It allowed her to work, call someone or watch TV as she did her papers or ate a meal. An instinct deep in her gut told her she wouldn't be leaving her plush, heated, massaging chair all evening unless it was to use her private en-suite bathroom. She needed to see first hand what CNN would report then write the first rebuttals and appropriately 'teary' commentaries about how the men in her family have always been angry,
violent and out of control, thus why she abandoned them to each other.

Lawrence and his base-born, low-browed minions could sweep the rest of the mess under his own rug after she was done clearing out the biggest, worse, legal and ethical pieces of rubble from the scene of the bungling idiot's crime.

{ SQ } - { Paternal power denied } - { SQ }

(Western Africa 01:00am)

(Eastern America 18:00pm)

Lawrence Albert Wise Wolenczak sat at his steel and glass desk in his official work room in the underwater sector of the World Power Project with the rest of today's load of blueprints to correct and contractor forms to amend. No matter how many hirelings he took on, it seemed that they were all made in the same school of 'methodic ineptness' that meant he had to hold their hand all day long through each and every task they had or calamities would befall his project. As it was, several contractors had AGAIN tried to bill WPP for services not done and parts that had not been delivered to the work site.

It wasn't that Lawrence was adverse to defrauding the project's purse; it was that said waylaid monies were routed to coffers not his own. As the Project Head and work site General Manager, the only frauds, bribes, kickbacks and thefts of time and parts that he tolerated were his own or those that he allowed after being rightfully compensated for such by the people committing the acts. If his reputation was going to get dinged by idiotic bureaucrats in NCQ or DC because of a few missing trinkets or accounting 'irregularities' then he had better have been 'satisfied' with the situation beforehand.

As he sat in his thickly padded swivel chair, the 'Master' of WPP watched the opening credits of the CNN 6 o'clock prime time news program with a feeling of detachment, disinterest even. Yes, this would probably do some damage to his reputation and cost him further gifts and bribes to stay in place but he could easily afford it. It wasn't as if he was paying with his own money after all. He hadn't paid out of his own pockets anything for over 18 years now, he wasn't going to go stupid and start emptying his personal reserves in the middle of a highly publicized familial war.

Lawrence may be vile, debased, depraved, and brutally violent as his usual everyday disposition towards every person and object he encountered, but he wasn't stupid. Nor was he inept, contrary to what his ex-wife systematically accused him of. Even Lucas who hated his guts with multiple virulent passions thought that his father's intellect and expertise at causing destruction were underestimated. Given their relationship all of his life, you just knew that for the teenager to actually say anything 'complimentary' about his male parent, he had to mean it.

The CNN program began with the presenter standing in front of the large view-screen with two massive images side by side; Lucas in the Stanford Hospital during his a public presentation and the UEO flagship as it sat in the New Cape Quest military drydock. After about five minutes of spiel and fore-story, an abridged version of the fight from 2 years ago was played, followed by short excerpts of video testimony from several doctors and police officers concerning the injuries that Lucas had received and how many surgeries, drugs and physiotherapy he had to undergo. This served as the basis for the lengthy detailed story that would follow.

After a commercial pause, the presenter exposed how Lawrence had 'supposedly' made a deal with the UEO Fleet Assets Head then gotten that backed legally and politically by the White House and the Dept of Defense by obtaining a written 'Presidential Decree' that was signed sealed and numbered to validate its 'binding' nature. The presenter exhibited photographs of both the presidential
papers and then the written 'orders to educate my son in a Godly Christian Way' that Lawrence had sent to the ship's personnel.

"Well, that's gonna stink up the whole country, right then and there." Lawrence mumbled. "Especially since I did actually bypass Noyce, the secretaries of Defense, Navy, Justice, Education and Health to get this done the way I wanted." Shrugging it off, the middle-aged man sniffed disdainfully. "Bof. Trump is good as a decoy; he'll monopolize their time and efforts so much they won't have any energy left for me. That will give me time to escape to a bolt hole, discretely and promptly, until events with his child calmed down."

After a second pause, the presenter exposed the life of Lucas since birth, starting with how whorish a self-pimping slut Cynthia had been all her life, never once stopping for either her marriage nor her pregnancy. The difficult birth, his being dumped at the common penthouse of the four elderly, ailing grand-parents and the private tutors' systematic, continuous 'cramming' of the baby boy's head with facts, know-how, techniques and sciences was detailed at length until age 4.

After a third advertising break, the presenter took up the story with the events of the idiotic, incompetent old brit tutor that Lawrence had had to rescue from his own lack of common sense. They made great case of the fact Lawrence had saved the man from 'active prosecution' by hijacking him and removing him from the country but he never so much as gave the time of day to his injured, traumatized baby son. It was one of Cynthia's clients, her male plaything of the day, that had accepted to do the surgeries and supervise the convalescence of the child 'pro bono' because otherwise no one was going to pay for it, despite the two large trust funds left by the grand-parents for exactly such uses.

Lawrence quietly processed a few papers during the break. Everything said was ugly but factual, and the blame was shared equally by both parents, so he didn't care that much. It would just help him twist Cynthia's arm into pulling her weight and mount the defense effort on her own coin and workforce. Besides, the important, and truly dangerous, parts of the story would come later.

After the fourth commercials, the presenter did a detailed overview of Lucas' studies during ages 5 to 10 with a graphic timeline now appearing on the screen besides him to serve as visual reminder of just how densely packed the small innocent boy's schedule was. The column had the dates on the far left, the age in the second column and the main event in the right-side column, complete with colored annotations to further explain the marking event. When exposed in imaged format like this, the type of lifestyle, accidents, victimizations and periods of convalescences seemed a lot more grave than when simply spoken out in bare words.

Lawrence himself could see that his only son had suffered quite a lot in his young life, and if HE could understand THIS, so could the tens of millions of viewers who would watch the story in the coming days. The fact the presenter had started this segment with a detailed explanation of WHY he had been revoked as parent and barred from ever having custody of the child by a tribunal in Buffalo was going to stay in the minds of the listeners quite clearly, too. This particular piece of trouble would come back to haunt him, no matter what Cynthia said about passing the blame onto the local DCFS or some other faceless bureaucratic drone hidden in an unidentified office, somewhere...

During that same pass, the presenter exposed the period of life Lucas lead with his cruel, violent tutors who kept him prisoner inside Cynthia's house and beat him systematically at each lesson on the orders of his mother who had claimed agreement with her ex-husband about how to handle the child to insure silent docility. The slow, methodical physical torments and psychological warfare sustained against the small boy were truly sickening to listen to. For the majority of humanity, that is. Lawrence didn't give a whizz what the miserable misbegotten sewer-rat had endured, only that he yet lived to burden him again and again with his presence.
During this segment it was revealed how Lucas used managed to intimidate his felonious mother into using the money from his trust funds to purchase for him the Ramshackle Manor in northern New York city at age 8 and then the venerable Old Glory in Buffalo city, the Wise Manor, at age 9. It was further revealed that it was at age 9 that Lucas founded and established the structures and first workshop for his most influential company; the renowned Wolenbahn Electronics International.

Lawrence took a sheet of paper to take notes on the multiple accomplishments and items of power or influence that the teenager had garnered in his short 16 years of life. Some had him blink interrogatively as the two large estates were clear money pits that should have burdened the boy's company so badly that it ended broke the very first year. Instead, there seemed to be something unsaid or still unknown by the news organization that they hadn't put in the report.

After the fifth commercials, the events of what happened on the Christmas week when Lucas turned ten and Cynthia sold custody over to Lawrence were exposed, along with the covert displacement towards Stanford to hide the injuries he had suffered at the hands of the depraved father and his two mercenaries. Several films from multiple security cameras around Wise Manor were shown, completely unedited, showing every last lurid, turpid detail from the moment Lawrence arrived in his luxurious Mercedes-Benz that he rarely drove since it was stored at his Buffalo house when he was away at WPP and elsewhere for lobbying efforts.

The raw films even showed how little 'innocent' Lucas had to attack defensively his father's minions with poison grenades to get them out of the way then rush at the violent rabid adult with a cast iron fire poker and start the fight of his young life. The recordings then showed the panting combatants sitting well apart, arguing angrily until the 10 year old child took the poker again to whack to death the two mercenaries before sitting again do engage in 'aggressive negotiations' with the rabid, fearful adult. The 40 year old male's grave injuries forced him to agree to the terms stated and sign some contracts very quickly so he could reach medical help lest he die at the hands of his son. The panicked father was shown stumbling out of the house and driving away in a panic, badly impaired, leaving the bodies of his hired men on his estranged child's floor without a care in the world. Then, the presenter took great pains to say and confirm with copies of Buffalo city's 911 logs that neither ambulance, police or DCFS had been called to the scene and the dead men had been made to disappear, never to be heard from again and nobody knew how or by the hands of whom.

Lawrence sat back into his chair, using both shaking hands to pick up his steaming mug of lemongrass tea to sip some calming brew as he used the sixth advertising break to contemplate the full ramifications of the events he had just seen on the monitor. Besides the resounding wallop to his public persona and reputation, the fact he had come to Lucas' home with mercs and weapons to inflict shame and pain unto the child would never pass muster, especially since it had been explained beforehand that he had permanently lost custodial authority over the boy six year prior at age 4. He was inside that house, trying to impose his views, morality, religiosity and parental power quite illegitimately and definitely ILLEGALLY, thus Lucas could plead 'self defense' and no jury or judge in the USA would think it a dishonest position.

After the return from the ads, the presenter exposed the boy's travels to Stanford, the time he spent in the University's private hospital being healed and tutored simultaneously, thus explaining his licenses as paramedic, nurse and orderly since he had maximized his hospital stay to benefit from the teaching staff while using his own body to learn these very useful skills and careers to help himself speed up his recovery. After that, the visual graphic of the boy's timeline began showing the lengthy list of yearly events and advanced graduate diplomas he acquired, mostly through studying from his apartment supplied by the campus just as he had been home-schooled in the past.

The announcer now explained the Christmas party when the boy was ambushed, attacked and almost raped by an adult-age student. He used the same films as were shown in the trials of the juvenile
thugs and their pedophile accomplice, backed by police reports, hospital files and testimonialsof other innocent bystander students. Then the series of surveillance tapes from the Stanford Police Station showed clearly the young officer in conversation with Lawrence in a closed interrogation room, discussing religion, conversion, and the 'christian paternal authority' the criminal parent wanted to inflict unto his boy to insure he grew up in 'disciplined godly boyhood' unlike the liberal crapulence he was wallowing in at Stanford at the moment. The young agent had taken a small red book from his jacket and caressed it in a manner that wasn't quite 'all there' as he spoke with Lawrence about the "Beauty of submitting boys to Men of Moral Standing under Jesus his God Christ and how government shouldn't interfere with Men of Faith and their Holy Works." The debased cop then accepted a check for 20,000$ from Lawrence in exchange for putting a clinical-grade drug in Lucas' coffee to knock out his sense of self-protection so Lawrence could hijack him to 'discipline him' sufficiently to make him accept Jesus as his Savior and 'convert' him once and for all.

After that, the channel played the films that showed clearly the adult grab and forcibly remove the drugged, spaced-out 14 year old, go to his car and drive back to the hotel. Then the presenter warned the audience of the utter violence and inhumanity of the coming scenes; that small children and people with weak hearts should not watch. After a few seconds of delay, the announcer explained that several of the scenes to come had been filmed secretly by a system of recording devices that Lucas always wore in case he was attacked or defrauded by a client so he had proofs to show in court. The man explained, with schematics on the monitor behind him, the array of meta-glasses, button camera, smartphone, hidden recorder and laptop comm-suite that the teenager had elaborated to protect his person and interests versus the criminal behavior of the people he encountered.

After these 2 minutes of explanations, the films from the hotel were played, from when Lawrence dragged the boy into the elevator in the underground parking level, to the suite, the adult's rabid raving and initial 'jumping' attack on the boy, the phases of the fight, the child again using homemade acid grenades to defend his very life. Then Lawrence's second rant, fearful retreat, Lucas crawling out on the corridor floor to beg for help and Lawrence's cowardly last hits as he ran out to seek yet again medical attention for his injuries. The segment closed on the hospital ICU ward photos and traumatology schematics showing the damages suffered by the teen and how many surgeries he underwent to survive and save his legs.

Lawrence passed the seventh commercial break sitting back into his chair, leaning heavily into the backrest, his entire body shaking with shivers of dread. He hadn't realized just how insane he had sounded during that rant, nor how violently he had jumped unto the small, lightweight teen. As he replayed the video in his mind, he simply couldn't think of anything that Cynthia and her cohorts of lawyers could do to save him from a jail cell, especially with the fact he had already been barred from contacting or controlling the child.

Added to this the fraudulent stories he told president Trump, the illegal decrees and the hot radioactive mess the Oval Office had to clean up, and nobody would try to help him. Snorting in contempt, he rectified his thoughts as he realized that there was at least one unrepentantly defective moron who would try something. Donald Trump would probably grant 'Presidential Clemency' and save him from a prison term if only because it would motivate his grassroots religious followers into a frenzy.

The announcer came back on to conclude the story. He explained that Lucas had fled to Canada in the night of Tuesday December 15th after setting up a series of postal and email deliveries of all the films, formularies, police files and medical dossiers to have a plethora of agencies initiate investigations. It was these files and films that made the Secret Service, FBI and NCIS commit an emergency Search & Seizure at the White House, targeting the Oval Office, The Presidential Archive, The Presidential Apartment and the offices of Trump's personal lawyers. It took barely an hour of speaking with the man himself for him to admit quite openly to what he had participated in
while handing over the original papers without any fuss. He was stupendously proud of making this deal with Lawrence. It was then that the recordings of the investigators’ body cams were played and sealed the case for writing Articles of Impeachment against the blond moppet of the ultra-right wing.

Before completely mesmerized global audiences, the commander-in-chief explained in quite ordinary words WHY he thought he had the right to do this and WHY he believed that "Loyal Faithful Christian Men shouldn't see their manners of educating and disciplining boys into the Godly Light of Redemption be subjected to ANY scrutiny at all, not even DCFS or the police." Trump even went further by stating "Kids should NEVER have any right to express opinions different than their preachers, tutors or parents under ANY circumstances and childish complaints about being abused, especially by priests or 'devout' worshipers, should always be disbelieved and NEVER be investigated.”

It further appeared that Trump didn't think the SCOTUS judgments about such subjects had any value, at least not towards his 'Authority of Presidential Decree', and therefore the 1979 ruling that forbids the use of any US military base or ship as a 'juvenile prison or reformatory' doesn't apply to this "Smart, well timed deal to support the religious rights of someone important that just converted unto Jesus our Lord, the God of the Bible, and help his dispirited son follow the same Righteous Path."

The news program announcer appeared again, informing the audience that given the extremely grave nature of the situation and the accusations that could emerge from the ongoing investigation, the regular programming was set aside to allow for a prolonged news brief on the Child Genius who, despite being a national treasure, was forced to flee to Canada, his criminal parents, the President's peddling of influence and using the Oval Office to preach, predicate and enforce theocratic creed, dogma, and illegal church-rule over citizens of his choice.

As the clock showed 18:58pm in the New York time zone and yet another batch of ads ran their course, the erstwhile 'Master' of WPP sat in his chair, turned around to look through the large picture window out at the oceanic depths that surrounded him. Even though he was completely dry, he just couldn't shake the feeling he was drowning and nobody would extend him a pole to bring him out of the water.

{ SQ } - { Cocktail hour at long last } - { SQ }

(Western Africa 02:00am)

(Eastern America 19:00pm)

Cynthia sat before he screen, mesmerized by what she had witnessed broadcast on a public channel that any cable subscriber, Internex client or even just an old AM/FM radio set could listen to without any censorship or government control over the delicate, socially and politically explosive information.

Truly the congenital idiocy endemic to American society knew no bounds.

The mature woman fidgeted quite ill-mannerly with her partially eaten dinner as it lay cold in her porcelain plate. The scraping noise of the fork against the dish's flat bottom was grating on her nerves but helped her to focus on the immediate problem.

Survival.

As it stood, her firm was dead. She could see her founding partners call her in the deep evening to ask for an emergency meeting at sunrise tomorrow to dissolve the company and go their separate
ways, as far away from her radioactive atomic-explosion-in-progress of a family situation as they could manage before the 7:00am news briefs on Monday morning. She wouldn't have a corporate name to wield nor any money to keep herself lodged and fed during a protracted series of investigations, police interventions and eventual court hearings, DCFS hearings and so forth.

And that was all before she had to consider her multiple properties, all of them bought on mortgages so as to maintain the biggest amount of cash-on-hand in case Lawrence or one of her seedier clients had gone truly insane. She had foreseen the possibility she may have to run and go underground for a while, at least until she could find a new situation safe enough to stay in it as she wielded her many contacts and contractors to resolve and clean up the mess. As it was, she could predict that she would need to willingly default on her outstanding loans to keep her money and find a way to cash it out of the bank accounts before they were frozen for investigative purposes.

Given that she had paid hirelings to systematically demean, degrade, harm and injure her son, she could see a prosecutor asking a judge to either freeze or even seize into an escrow account all of her liquidities to avoid that she pay someone to intimidate Lucas into silence or death. Since it would also dangerously limit her potential to whelm a legal defense, it would almost guarantee that prosecutor's victory and a serious public opinion push towards whatever elected position the man may want to present himself for in the years after she had been destroyed.

Cynthia could see much farther into the future than Lawrence ever believed; she could see that as of now, there was no longer any positive, constructive future for her in America, Canada, or even most of Europe. Not as Cynthia Lydia Wise Holtzenstein, not ever again. She would need to change her identity which included modifying her appearance permanently through severely invasive plastic surgery. She had the contacts, of course. She had helped Lawrence procure the parts and skilled medics to reconstruct what Lucas had destroyed or damaged on his body. She most certainly could do the same for herself, even on such a short notice.

Opening a secret compartment under the left armrest of her chair, she took out a small brown felt pouch from which she pulled a dozen pristine, clear diamonds, cut and polished to an iridescent shine. At an average 2 carats and valued at 75,000$ each, the unmarked stones she had procured through her mafia clients a few years ago were solid universal currency anywhere on Earth. Even if she took a small loss on the resale, she would still have around 750,000$ to float on, giving her a few decades of living in very limited housing but above poverty, and certainly not misery. Besides, as soon as she was housed and safe, she would call in favors and liquidate a few hidden assets that she bought under anonymous shell companies in foreign countries and then find a truly permanent remote locality to restart her life as a woman of wealth and leisure.

If it cost her a new face and name, so be it. She wasn't especially attached to the ones she had.

As the second hour of the CNN 'emergency special broadcast' program came on, she lowered the sound and pulled out the keyboard to start accessing her many bank accounts, savings, investments and other 'legal' money placements so she could use the completely dehumanized remote banking apps to pull out and move her cash to countries where Trump's vagaries and US law enforcement didn't mean much when compared to cold hard currency. After that, she would go home to her penthouse condo and take the necessities to move out to the farm in Vermont from where she would plan her next move.

She had acquired and warehoused a small vintage propeller airplane about four years ago. It was stashed on the farm, in an old barn at the edge of the property and the private gravel roadway leading from the building to the main homestead had been widened and the greenery trimmed to allow usage as a private year-round runway. The moment she was in the penthouse, she would call the farmhand that served as the occasional pilot so he could pack his bags and prepare the plane for immediate
departure the very moment she came unto the property. Thanks to her illicit contacts, the airplane was registered to a shell corporation in Brazil and the vehicle had two transponders; the real one and the alternate pirate signal to switch identity to look like a small chartered courier plane doing an expensive priority UPS air-mail delivery. She could thusly leave US air space unchallenged and unseen.

Lawrence and the runt could clean up the mess by themselves. She was done for it.

"Rio de Janeiro, her I come!" she whispered happily as she moved money from her official personal accounts over to a general anonymous 'buffer' account she created for that purpose. "I may be forced into exile the rest of my life, but at least I won't see anymore snow unless I visit Switzerland for an Alps' chalet vacation at some point. Humph! Who would have guessed that there would be a silver lining to this debacle?" The felonious mother snickered as she typed her fortune into a phantom bank in the depths of the Dark Web.

Billy Piggy-Boy Noyce

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 00:31am (midnight)

East America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 17:31pm

West America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 14:31pm

UEO district; apartment of Adm. Noyce (location classified)

New Cape Quest, Florida, USA

Somewhere in the low-lying tourist sector of the city, less than five minutes of walking distance from the beige sand beaches, was located a small 6 storey apartment complex dedicated to a very classy and illusive clientele. The edifice was unmarked except for a small name plate in the foyer that read something only the manager of many, many public domain assets could possibly think was a decent name for a building. "Longitude; Latitude; Altitude; orientation; property ##" just didn't mean anything to anybody except those few people charged with the physical security of the UEO's topmost public servants and assets. If you dug deep enough in the UEO's procedure manuals, you could find that these were the coordinates programmed in a battery of plasma warhead tipped hypersonic missiles placed about 250 kilometers away on an elevated concrete pier surrounded by salt water, sharp rocky shoals and automated pulse rifle CIWS turrets.

The secrets inside that building would STAY secret and the inhabitants would not be taken hostage for any reason at any cost. If the entire city block had to be leveled down into a depression that reached below the sewer lines to insure this, going so far as to cremating the other high-value, secure edifices in the blast zone around the targeted block, then so be it. Each and every resident of these small luxurious apartment towers knew of the safety measures and 'scorched earth' protocols in place when they signed the leases that came with the function, position or rank offered by the UEO Council cabinet.

William Allard Boyd Noyce, 63 years old, caucasian white, rotund, bald, 6 feet tall and all of it filled with malice and gleeful malevolence, had helped to create and engraine into UEO procedural books the protocols and he was quite happy at how they turned out. Their application in 'material reality' as some would say, was not badly done either. For once, the gear-heads had been able to take the paper blueprints and built up something with a passable resemblance of what he expected to have.
Since the good admiral (yeah, we'll get back to you on that...) had planned all this setup specifically because he could see where the Trump people were going with their amateurish manipulations of the UEO Cabinet and the nomination process around the top jobs in the departments and services of the Alliance, well, he wanted his protection and overwatch to be a certain way. After spending four decades in the US Navy Intelligence division from the moment he got out of the Navy Academy at age 21 till barely 4 years ago, Billy had played the 'spy game' far too long and accumulated far too many enemies to leave the safety of his family in the hands of low-ranked beginners chosen for how close to the boss's children they were. He had far too many secrets of national security from way too many countries swishing around his mind to allow anybody but himself access to those. Even the current occupant of the White House was aware of only about 1% of what Noyce knew or could find out about, and it would stay that way.

"No reason to give the nincompoop any more ways to damage the country than he already had over the last 4 years." His dear beloved wife (that depends on the day she had, really...) Janet would tell him periodically. Then again, she'd been saying that about everybody elected or nominated to public office so unfortunate to cross her path since the early eighties when he met her and married her. Billy hadn't regretted that lightning-strike romance one bit, even if he hadn't really slept all that deeply or had to test his food periodically for poisons since getting into to bed with her.

Damned CIA bitch... Backstabbers the lot of them...

Not that he complained, of course, but whence took her the 'womanly moods' once in a while, it was better for a certain sailor to find a different port to lay in harbor whilst the storm at the home port spent itself out on something else. At least when those mood swings struck her, his pigs were well fed for the week after. Poor widdle baby wiggly pigglies... All pink and fat and weighed down by all that solid, hearty meat... Hhhhhmmm... Bacon...

Getting up from the desk inside his completely enclosed, secured office room, the veteran admiral tapped a code on the wall-inset keypad to release the door so he could leave for dinner and watch the evening news to see what new calamity the DC crowd had birthed on the last week-end before the Christmas celebrations. Eating at his desk was something he used to do back at the Pentagon when he was younger and climbing the ladder was important. Now that he had reached the topmost echelon of said ladder and nothing but empty air awaited the step above, he wasn't moving anymore unless he decided to make the plunge into elected politics and tried out as US representative on either the UEO council or the North American Confederation Council. Since neither interested him that much, he favored holding on to his new posting with all his might then go into retirement for good when it was done.

If his wife didn't poison him before then. He really did know far too much.

Janet was semi-retired for a couple of years already; she no longer did any field work (officially), not that she would tell him for real, conniving bitch that she was, but at least she didn't get odd phone calls at Gawd-awful in the morning to hitch a flight to Belgrade or Istanbul or London or another remote place of power of such level any longer. From the setup inside her own enclosed secured office right next to his, Billy could deduce that she had scaled-down to deciphering coded messages from very old moles, deeply embedded in sleeper mode inside the enemy's bosom. She sometimes wrote threat assessments for the CIA or DXS directors about the European Confederation's member states and she had been keynote speaker last year at a conference about the formation of the Montagnard Confederation with all of south-Asia's countries allying around the reunited Korea's.

And yes, she still sent out her poisoned pen letters or indigestible baked goods from time to time.

William valued his sanity, and his fingers, so he didn't pry in her business. In return, she didn't get
involved in Navy affairs and all went well in their married life. Besides, the guys who listened to the bugs and wiretaps around the apartment would have warned him if anything truly momentously weird was happening in the CIA's patch and his dear wife had her mitts in it. The Company's own overwatch team would probably give the old gal a similar head's up if things got fugly on his side of the fence, too.

Western Africa; 00:40am (midnight)

East America; 17:40pm

West America; 14:40pm

Finally making it to his open-plan kitchen, dining & living room, the venerable old admiral was able to see that a veritable storm of cooking, grilling, baking and packaging had taken place today. That was a sure sign that the family was coming over for the holidays this year instead of them going over at the Pig Farm in Alabama as had been their custom for the last twenty years. The youngest grand-kids were old enough to be left alone without fearing a mess or egregious breach of operational security anymore so they could even be let out to roam the tourist district whilst the old foggies would gab about the old days. It certainly wasn't the familial atmosphere that him and Janet wanted to maintain but try having anything familial inside a damned condo and see what you got.

Blah! - The demands of the job, indeed!

Writing off that line of thoughts as a bad job done, Billy got himself situated at the breakfast bar so he could look into the actual kitchen to behold what level of mess his beautiful, delectful wife had contrived on this fine December eve. And - hot damn! - the woman been cook'n up a storm!

"Janet, dearie; you do know that you don't have to cook for the high school football team's victory party anymore since we officially moved out of town four years ago, don't ya?" Asked the sailor as he beheld the complete mess that had every counter and appliance buried under foodstuffs, sundries, condiments and cooking utensils in various states of uncleanness. Yeeeppp... His dear wife was in 'The Womanly Moods' again and it was probably his poor hide that would pay for it. Again.

"Oh, shut yer yapp, you great big coward!" answered an irate voice coming from the depths of the two-door refrigerator where Janet was trying to figure out how to stack everything she made to avoid losing any until she could 'gift' them unto 'undeserving' souls. Her caucasian-white skin was sprinkled with flour, sugar and cake icing in comical splotches whilst her silvery hair was falling loose from its bun atop her head, glittering with sugar and icing too.

Clenching fists that had broken men and countries alike, the determined woman griped at her piss-poor storage space. Damn condo! Why did she leave her nice large house of three decades in DC to come here? Blast it all! There was no ways in bloody blue tarnation that her famous 'crushed glass powder glitter-icing rhum-sponge cake' was going to the bin, no sirree! At least, the 'mint liquor and digitalis chocolate bonbons' could fit in the egg holders in the door itself thus freeing some space in the main shelves...

Pulling out of the fridge, Janet wagged a warning finger at her husband of forty years and griped amusedly "All you do in this here kitchen is sit there like a fat old harbor buoy beached at low tide, wait'n for a tug to haul your ample posterior back out'ta sea! When you do mor'an fill your gullet with my precious productions, then I'll reckon you a word about how I organize things in here!"

William, well aware of the value of a timely strategic retreat during border skirmishes of the domestic
life sort was about to give up the fight with good graces when the doorbell rang. Immediately he had a derringer 4-shot pistol in the left hand and a large 12 inch long combat knife in the right that sported an odd shine to its wet blade, his movements flowing fluidly with getting up from the stool and relocating behind the massive dining table. The thing looked like mahogany but it was actually inch-thick tempered steel veneered in faux-wood to serve as defensible shelter in case of home invasion.

Janet pulled a uzi machine-pistol with silencer and laser pointer from the hidden slot between the side of the dishwasher and the counter's storage drawers. She added a butcher's knife held in her mouth by the teeth and a fragmentation grenade in the left hand, ready to throw since she pulled the pin the moment she wrapped her fingers around the false can of sweet peas.

All the cabinetry in the kitchen was built like the dining table and chairs, with the appliances armored and reinforced to survive multiple concussive or shrapnel blasts. The fridge could even be emptied and used as a panic shelter for 15 minutes to survive grenades and gunfire until building security came up, if nothing else was accessible.

Bill and Janet had not only survived the cold war, the collapse of the UN and the creation of the new confederations and the UEO, they had THRIVED in the chaotic primordial soup of blood, guts and floating corpses that defined the Post-UN Oceanic Colonization Era. There wasn't a Betrayal they hadn't lived or inflicted, there wasn't a Death they hadn't witnessed or committed in turn, and they both had tortured and Broken enough people, organizations and small countries in their careers to have a clear honest view of what awaited them at the End of Time.

People like them never slept at peace; not in this world, nor in the next.

As the bell rang a second time, Bill asked his wife in low growling tones "Are the kids early? Why didn't they call to have me confirm with the security desk downstairs? And how in bloody Hell's Bells did they make it up to this level without gun fire sounding out?"

Janet was busy using her grenade-holding hand to lower the temperature on the oven and range so she grumbled something truly unhelpful as her husband moved to pull out a small touchscreen from the thickness of the tabletop near him. It immediately activated to show him the main entry and their undesired guest.

"Fuck me hard with a phone pole, why don't you!" cursed the admiral as he saw the face. "It's a bloody ass-kisser from DC!"

Rolling her eyes at her man's lack of precision, Janet mumbled around the knife blade in her mouth "Which one, you twit? You know how many butt-huggers they be up north?"

Snorting a contemptuous response, the sailor replied "It's the darned feds, dearie! The DHS came a-callin' on our festivities, it seems like."

As another ring sounded through the condominium, the matronly dame spat out her knife, dropping it back into its drawer before setting the uzi and grenade in their holding caches too. "Well, you larded lout! Don't just wait there for me to ring 'em in! I'm busy cookin' & packin'! Make a man o' yourself for a change, lazybones, and get the empty suit in here. Wonder whad'de want on a 18th o' December like that, I do!"

Grumbling about bossy CIA ex-operatives and slave-driving wives, the overweight male pushed the door opening button on the finger-print sensitive screen while juggling with his hardware to conceal it back in its proper places before the suit-clad twit walked in on him 'au naturel' so to speak. He barely had the time to shove the pistol and knife back in their hidden sleeves of is pale beige UEO
day uniform that the unnamed DHS delegate marched in to sit himself at the dining table without being given leave to do so as good manners dictate.

Now, if it were anybody else Janet would have cussed a storm and told the ill-mannered little twit what she thought of his uneducated entry to her house while Bill would have verbally reamed him several new orifices and put a nasty letter in his file for reading when promotion time came around. As it was, they knew the man quite well as they worked with him for several years already. They tolerated his mannerisms because they were 'amusing' or like Janet said "A proof he wan't cast from a mold". Their impromptu visitor was no less than the Assistant Director of the US Department of Homeland Security in charge of "Canadian borderline and joined bi-national police actions", Captain Iain O'Callahan, that transferred from NCIS to DHS about seven years ago.

The six foot, three inches, heavy white male had blond hair in a buzzcut, ice blue eyes that seemed unfeeling at first glance and a mouth downturned in a constant frown. He had a temperament that was well matched to the Noyce's and his methodology for handling situations wasn't very far from theirs, if usually less subtle and far more publicly carried out. He had been formed in a police academy then decided to join the Navy for a short career amongst the Military Police before getting grabbed by the NCIS office in Seattle where he worked for several years. The harsh man had a lot of experience with the canucks, still had some family over there and a hunting lodge in northern Manitoba that he went to for 2 weeks vacation every summer to catch some nice caribou red meat fresh out of the bush.

{ SQ } - { Trump's religious idiocy at work } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 00:45am (midnight)

East America; 17:45pm

West America; 14:45pm

Captain O'Callahan sat at the dining table as if he owned the place, aware but unimpressed by the fact the two paranoid warmongers had probably been stashing sharp steel and guns back into hidey-holes just before he set foot in the open-plan area. It wouldn't surprise him if there were a multi-trigger bomb under the chair, just in case of uninvited guests like him making themselves too much at ease for the tastes of the proprietors. He was, however, not daft enough to ask confirmation; they'd explode his stinking arse out the patio doors in lieu of answer just because that's how they were.

Not much on civility or manners, them Noyce's.

On the other hand, they were loyal to the United States of America, its creed and founding principles like few people alive today had ever been. And they were efficient at keeping traitors, sell-outs and foreign agents in their proper place; outside the borders or in shallow unmarked graves. That there usually was a lengthy interrogation of the inhumane kind before the disposal of fleshly remains was not his concern, so long as they were above 99% certain of the person having turned traitor or being a foreign spy. That was the sine qua non condition under which all of them studiously disregarded the less savory activities of each other's agencies and minions. Should a genuine american citizen be subjected to such methods whilst being 'truly innocent', there would be a cascade-effect of heads rolling and several changes of policy and office-holders in the deficient structure.

One does not torture real honest Americans for just simple peccadilloes like diverging political opinions, religious inclinations or personal and familial dislikes. If ever O'Callahan heard of an agency going fully rogue like the CIA's Afghanistan Cell had done with the NCIS-OSP over the last two years, then he'd have all of DHS after their heads. As it was, only his personal connections with the agency directors Raymond Uthenberg at CIA, Horatio Derrel at NSA, Mathilda Webber at DXS,
Armand Klepp at FBI, and Leon Vance at NCIS had stayed his hand.

This time.

There wouldn't be a 'next time' for the Company, nor any other agency of the USA.

Besides, Henrietta Lange had asked him personally the favor of being allowed to handle things discreetly, under the public's radar, or else ALL the country's defensive and counter-terrorism institutions would lose any credibility they still had. After 4 years of Trump and his state-destroying cultists, assuming they had ANY such credibility left was an act of optimism such as only the operations manager of NCIS-OSP could ever demonstrate. Then again, after what she had lived through in her 70+ years of life, she would have a different perspective than most.

Bleh! The situation facing them all would change the face, workings and very nature of America in such a way that menial territorial feuds like had happened before between agencies would no longer be tolerated. The ceaseless multiplications of these redundant agencies would be curbed and the agents would be reassigned to one of the two or three services that would remain from the reorganization.

And the primary purpose of the clean-up would be to keep a mess like today from ever again occurring.

"What happened?" Janet asked as she brought over a pot of coffee on a silver tray with all the cups, spoons and condiments. "I've been cooking all day and Billy was in his office all the time."

Ian grumbled as he fixed himself a cup before answering "Trump just sank his chances of escaping impeachment by committing a series of crimes that are already on CNN as we speak. If you open the 6 O'clock news, you'll know it all. I was given the scripts that CNN is using for its news briefs tonight at around 14:00pm earlier today by an 'implanted' agent, so I already know all of it well enough to give you both the Cliff notes for now, then we can watch the 18:00pm newscast."

The DHS man swallowed some coffee before he detailed the mess they faced. "There is this violent little bastard of a man called Lawrence Wolenczak who runs the World Power Project. I do believe you both know him? Because he certainly drops your name, Billy, in every conversation he has with anybody in DC or the US navy. Well, this vile little stain has tried repeatedly to kill off his only child and failed miserably. So he tried to have others do it for him, this time around."

William shook his head in disbelief. "Please tell me he didn't..."

Ian shrugged in sympathy. "Yes, he did. Since he thought himself so high and mighty in The Order Of Things, the defective bastard called people around the Pentagon until he somehow managed to secure a 'punitive placement' for his 16 year old son aboard the least accessible, most invisible ship in the entire UEO Fleet – The SeaQuest. The goal was to have the sailors manage the 'disciplinary redressment' of the young man by beating, raping and breaking him until he stayed submissive to his father for the rest of his miserable broken life. In case there were any questions or doubts about the process to be done or the rights and duties of the sailors involved, dear Lawrence wrote out at extensive length the details of what he wanted and that he was extending his 'christian paternal authority' unto the duly contractually hired 'disciplinary surveillants & spiritual tutors' of his only child for the duration of his reeducation into an obedient, loyal, faithful christian child."

William exploded immediately: "HOW the fucking Hells does this fool think he has access to the flagship of the UEO Fleet? It hasn't even been in the US Navy for over 4 years already! WHO was it that allowed this depravity to happen? Just HOW did that meaningless bastard come to think he could use any ship of the international fleet as a private penitentiary for his son? And where did he
even get the idea of doing this?"

O'Callahan continued "I haven't a clue from what Hell-pit he took the idea; I just see the result. The facts that are established are these: Lawrence wrote actual orders that transformed every adult aboard SeaQuest into a jailer – cum – Church Inquisitor with the express purpose of breaking the body and soul of his teenaged son while using the thin excuse of wanting him devoted to white christian dominance. When several admirals in the US Navy told him they could not or would not sign off on the 'supposed legality' of his depraved orders, he went above all the service heads and talked to president Trump directly."

Ian gestured with his cup pointedly at Billy and said "That's where the shit hits the fan at supersonic speeds. The dumb blond bimbo in the Oval Office had gone to a military academy in his teen years and thought the idea Lawrence was selling him was a great one. The fact Lawrence explicitly wrote he wanted to forcibly convert his son to white supremacy and conservative christian messianism made Trump almost wet himself at the principles he was discussing with Lawrence. So the imbecile manually wrote out a damned 'Presidential Decree' and then signed and sealed the stupid paper before ordering the Oval Office's secretary to scan and email the papers. Those stinking pieces of turd were sent to everybody on the SeaQuest's list of crew and civilian attachés, along with hundreds of people in the Pentagon, the Dept. of Defense, Dept. of Justice, and the Dept. of Human Services in charge of fostering children to make them validate the whole gimmick."

Janet was wearing an expression of utter disbelief as she asked "Didn't Wolenczak's requests and method of petitioning for it raise any flags in his mind? Didn't Trump see the entire scheme for the criminal conspiracy it was?"

The DHS AD shook his head negatively. "President Trump thought it was, for him and the USA, a good little deal to make on the side and didn't think it was illegal, either. The man genuinely thought that since the departments were subordinated to the president in the executive chart, that he could just 'make the decision' and then force the directors sign off on it like in a private company. No questions would be asked and there would be no 'details' to explain to DCFS or some other 'child protection' agency. And THAT is important here; Trump, like several hundreds of thousands of christian worshipers, hates and reviles all the 'educational standards' and the many 'child protection' laws and agencies of the USA. Like his grassroots followers, he believes that 'God gave ownership of the children' to their parents and no human government should ever interfere in this 'sacredly-bound duty'."

"During the FBI / NCIS search that happened at the White House early this morning, president Trump told the agents everything that happened quite openly, right into the lenses of their body cams. He didn't hide anything and was truly surprised that the Presidential Office did not in fact have the authority to decide 'executively' where, why or whom to place children with in order to insure their 'morally faithful christian upbringing' to make them the next generation of 'Great Americans' that would Rule The World in God's name."

The two Noyce's were quite literally flabbergasted. It was one thing to know that the geriatric crud who led the White House was a regressist bastard and religious fool who used 'Prosperity Gospel' as a childish excuse to justify his personal profiteering, nepotism and many public explosions of bombastic distemper. It was quite an other thing to be proven publicly on film just how religiously backwards, racially bigoted and socially disjuncted the man actually was. There was NO WAY that the population of America would accept this, let alone permit that it becomes the 'Settled Law' of the country.

Not only would the atheists and humanists raise a stink, but even a large number of religiously faithful people understood the fundamental need for DCFS, public schools and the state-mandated
care and protection of children. What Trump had done was nothing less than the backdoor re-
legalization of child enslavement, forcible religious conversion under beatings and transforming kids
into child-aged soldiers but without any salaries or rights like those of adult soldiers. Basically,
Trump tried to take America back legally and socially to the 1700's when the British Crown sent
'press gangs' into the poor areas of its towns to forcibly draft boys aged 10 to 16 to serve on the
warships at rigging repairs, sweeping decks and dumping the offal buckets overboard.

As things were, the sitting US president had just declared publicly that it was "OK to beat, break,
rape and torture any children under your care if you had a written Declaration of Christian Creed to
show the police". By his words and the felonious documents he had signed, as long as your violence
and depravity served the purpose of 'converting' the poor 'dispirited' kids back unto the path of
'morality' then it should be seen as legal, legitimate, moral and also be exempt from government
oversight.

Janet asked in a low, sickly voice "And this is on CNN already? And there were agents from the
FBI, NCIS and Secret Service present when the idjiot redneck spilled the beans?"

O'Callahan simply nodded his head positively as he sipped his coffee.

William stood from his chair and threw his cup against the far wall where it exploded in thin
porcelain shards and a cloud of coffee. "Janet! Turn on the TV! Watch the damned thing, then call at
the Company to get some ground-floor intel! I'm calling the directors on vid-meet and we'll watch it
together to decide what the group's answer will be. This needs to happen now, Jeannie!" He bellowed
as he trotted his ample girth to his office post haste. Going without any further explanations, he
marched to his office where he locked himself in so he could have emergency contact with several
people and groups. They all needed to watch this and plan their responses to the fallout because this
could spell the End of America as they knew it.

Janet pursed her lips before she queried "What will DHS do about this?" as she fiddled with the pull-
out tablet on her side of the table to activate the TV set mounted on the far wall, just between the
living and eating areas. The CNN logo and newscast opening credits scrolling on the screen told her
they hadn't missed anything yet as the 18:00pm National Evening News program was just starting.

Ian replied indolently as he watched the TV; "It isn't our jurisdiction right now. It stinks of
corruption, peddling of influence, attempt at forcible religious conversion of soldiers & civilians,
attempt at legalizing the torture of children, and a whole lot more. But none of it concerns DHS other
than the attempt to illegally place a child aboard an active service warship carrying nuclear engines
and ordinance. Unfortunately, that one hits right at the top of the ladder, on the bozo sitting at the
Resolute Desk. The rest of all charges could, in all honesty, be handled by the DOJ through either
the FBI or the Secret Service. As such, what I heard from the director of DHS is that we will keep a
'scrutinize but hands-off' approach to the situation and advise as it develops."

Janet refilled their cups before she asked "What about that zealy bitch, Andrea Dre? She's Trump's
slut in the UEO council; everybody knows that since it was never really hidden. What did the
woman say about all this?"

O'Callahan shrugged carelessly. "Nothing yet. She went to her family estate in New Zealand back
on Monday so she won't hear of this until it's passed a certain time on her island. Time zones and
regional broadcasting zones, and all that... But she will react, I can tell you that much. She considers
SeaQuest as the single-most important part of the UEO Fleet and she almost oversaw the entire refit
and conversion of the ship from her office atop the UEO building. Why do you think that she
insisted the ship be brought to the drydocks in New Cape Quest instead of back at her official port-
of-call in Pearl Harbor?"
Janet hadn't known that bit of gossip, so she had no comment. As it was, both old friends got comfortable on the couch in the living area with the wall-mounted TV well in view. They could watch this in style while Billy sat on his cheap hard pike in his study with a bunch of wrinkled old men from DC to keep him company over the vidphone. She was done with that period of her life and she would not be going back to it for anything.

{ SQ } - { Exalted meeting } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 01:05am

East America; 18:05pm

West America; 15:05pm

Will Noyce sat at his desk, glaring at the TV on the left side that showed the CNN newscast starting up, as the military-grade encrypted Internex monitor was dialing several numbers together to start an emergency video conference. Will would be the head of the meeting and needed a few moments to straighten out his thoughts. What he had just learned moments ago went beyond the Pale of anything he had expected the dumb-ass in the White House to try now that he had a second mandate and was essentially no longer attackable on the 'public vote' side of things.

The monitor lit up, showing the faces of the American Senior Officers and Agency Directors whom were all presently in emergency transit to reach the highly classified, secret underground Convention Bunker located at Lake Barcroft in Fairfax County, in Virginia, not far from Washington DC.

* The US Secretary of the Department of Defense – DOD (Robert E. Reagan)
* The US Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency – DIA (Laurent Yves)
* The Director of the Presidential Secret Service – USSS (Roland Toopin)
* The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff – JCS (Gen. Allen D. Wauchsaw)
* The Chief of the National Guard Bureau – NGB (Gen. Walter Venice)
* The US Secretary of the Navy – USN (Adm. Flinn T. Woodhall)
* The US Secretary of the Army – USA (Gen. Jebediah S. Scornhill)
* The US Secretary of the Air Force – USAF (Gen. Amato Maria de San Coronado)
* The US Secretary of the Orbital Defense – USOD (Mary-Anise Beudoin, PhD)
* The Judge Advocate General of the Navy (Vice-ADM Leonora Harrigan)
* The Naval Criminal Investigations Services Director – NCIS –(Leon Vance)
* The US Navy Intelligence Director – USNI – (Adm. Randy Elms)
* The Director of the Department of External Services – DXS – (Mathilda Webber)
* The Federal Bureau of Investigation Director – FBI – (Armand Klepp)
* The National Security Agency Director – NSA – (Horatio Derrel)
* The Central Intelligence Agency Director – CIA – (Raymond Uthenberg)
* The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency – DARPA (Anette Sorensen, PhD)
* FBI Head of National Capital Defensive Policing Protocols (SSA Seely Booth)
* The chief of the Washington DC National Guard & Militia (Mario Boudreau)

The UEO officials online were mostly in their homes in New Cape Quest in Florida, except for the chief of military police who was at a delegation office in south London, England.

* The UEO secretary for Military Affairs (Lloyd Handower, Britannic)
* The UEO secretary for Borders, Customs and Migration (Hubert Frelat, French)
* The UEO Military Intelligence Analysis Director (Vincenzo Delarosa, Italian)
* The UEO Military Police Director (Joseph Michaels, canadian)
* The UEO Judge Advocate General (Admiral Gunther Garver, German)
* The Chief Judge of the International Penal Tribunal (Mariska Lourt, Polish)
* The Governor of The World Bank (Iegor Desdensky, russian)
* The commanding officer of the SeaQuest (commander Jonathan D. Ford, American)

Joining them was also the venerable, and well retired, US Navy captain Nathan Hale Bridger, designer of the SeaQuest, who was on his private tropical island near south Florida.

Bill told them all to get themselves in position to watch the CNN broadcast with him and be ready to take notes and phone people on the go. Things were getting HOT in DC and they needed to be able to react to this as he meltdown happened. As soon as everybody confirmed they had the news opened and currently passing some commercials, he told them briefly:

"All right, people, I just got briefed by one of Homeland Security's assistant-directors about the clusterfuck happening in DC. I want to tell you all right now what the REAL Law & Rule of the UEO Fleet are." Bill declared firmly.

"Firstly, it's always been illegal for the UEO to employ slaves and forced labor of any sorts, PERIOD. And that includes buying products from factories that use slaves or prison labor, even just as subcontractors or secondary suppliers in the fabrication chain. Any employee or citizen of the UEO Alliance that breaks these laws and rules will find himself in front of the International Penal Tribunal fighting for his life as the Alliance does have the power of capital execution for High Felonies and Treason-class crimes."

"Secondly, in the UEO Alliance, the age of majority is 18 years old. It's the minimal age at which the Alliance recognizes those legal contracts deemed 'of vital importance' like marriage, adoption, divorce, emigration, citizenship, life-changing medical procedures and such. Any such contracts signed before age 18 are subject to automatic review by the IPT's Youth & Family Division under the suspicion that the young person was entered into the decision or process against their own self-protection. Such documents become binding through the rest of the Alliance Members only after the IPT has validated them. Business, commerce, employment and education are considered 'menial dealings' subject only to the local authorities of the territory where they happen, thus explaining why millions of teenagers can legally hold jobs, be contractors and even own a company without adult oversight."
"Thirdly, the UEO does not in any way, shape or form, participate in the religious conversion, free or forced, of anybody, especially children. That is the policy through the Fleet, Military Police, or any other agency that was created as part of the Treaty in 2017 when Trump forced the dissolving of the UN and its many agencies that helped to regulate and protect humanity as well as the planet."

"Fourthly, the UEO is a military alliance for the defense of the FREE NATIONS of the planet against terrorists, cartels, pirates, smugglers, and organized crime of any origin or goal. We handle the 'international' territories for apprehension only, then we hand the culprits over to the member country closest to the place of the crime, unless outstanding warrants from other member exists. We DO NOT enter our member nations to commit policing actions on 'sovereign land'. Ever!"

"Fifthly, we do not enter the 'internal processes, legislation or jurisdiction' of our member nations under any situation less than enemy invasion in progress that needs to be repelled. That means we do not in any way, shape or form tell them how to manage their country or people, ever."

"To close with a separate but vital Sixth Point; the USA does not own the SeaQuest. They haven't owned the boat since the foundation of the North-American Confederation in late 2012 after the disbanding of NATO for its inefficiencies. At that point, the USA was short on cash and couldn't pay a large enough amount to insure its dominant position in the new Confederation, so they gave the ownership title for the boat to the NAC in lieu of cash-down. When the North-American Confederation joined the UEO at its foundation in 2017, the USA government, meaning Trump, was again strapped for cash. The White House thought they could hoodwink the members states of the new Treaty by putting up the SeaQuest as cash-down for NAC membership all the while passing it as USA property that was being generously 'loaned' for the duration of the treaty. However, it was the NAC that was the title-holder and the Confederation Cabinet, even more short on money than the USA, agreed to commit the actual sale of the ship to the UEO Council. All this to say; Trump never had the right to just pick up the phone and send you orders, especially not about crew placements, maneuvers or classified work. Those are the jobs of UEO accredited personnel like ME, not the damned ass-kisser in DC."

Commander Ford nodded with visible relief. "The commander of the UEO flagship acknowledges and understands your explanations, sir. We will file as illegal the orders received from Washington DC and disregard them. I will brief the military staff and civilians aboard to that effect. But, sir, that still leaves us short of several key personnel that are critical to run the ship with any efficiency. At this point, I would hesitate to take her out of drydock, let alone into a dangerous storm or a firefight."

William Noyce pointed at Bridger and declared "That's where this wrinkled old lout comes in. I had wanted to take a few weeks to sweet talk you into coming out of retirement willingly, old bean, but needs must! Captain Bridger, by the authority invested in me as Head of UEO Fleet Assets, I hereby make a formal request of the US Dept. of Defense to reactivate your commission at the rank and position of captain so as to answer the imminent political and social crisis in two of our member states. Should he accept, you would immediately be transferred from US-N to UEO-N and elevated to the captaincy of the SeaQuest with the task of keeping the ship out of the hands of manipulative politos and religious fanatics. Further orders and supplementary protocols would be forwarded by UEO Fleet as needed."

The US Secretary of Defense affirmed "I so order. The written version will be sent by email and the official document carrying the seals of office will be waiting for you aboard the ship when you rendez-vous with her. The details of the meeting date and zone can be arranged between you and the boat."

Bridger passed a weary hand down his face as he sighed tiredly. "That wasn't the Christmas present I expected from you, Bill. A lemon & mint cake from Janet, yes, but not a new job from you.
Especially a damned job that I thought I had put behind me and wouldn’t be bothered with anymore. Do you know just how much bloody politics and diplomacy that ship implicates daily?"

Billy replied without a shred of pity "Yeeeeepppp, I sure do! That’s why I went up in the chain of command and left the patsy of the day handle her, with all her pleasures and cheap thrills."

"I should feed you to your own pigs, Billy!" Nathan replied, momentarily forgetting the group of people they were online with. "But then, you’d probably infect the poor animal and I’d be stuck with a mutated Noyce-pig zombie that would haunt me for the rest of my days!" Shaking his head in misery, Nathan groaned "My wife Carol had warned me about staying friends with you! I should have listened to her when I still could!"

{ SQ } - { Sailing orders } - { SQ }

The eruptions of laughter from the other participants showed they sympathized with the veteran sailor but not so much as to liberate him from his relationship with the admiral. As the advertisements were winding down, the admiral pointed an angry finger at the TV and told the people to watch and jack-up the sound so they didn’t miss anything. The next minutes could be critical for the country’s future.

They were. America was heading down the pipes.

Even with just the basic outline of the case explained at the beginning of the program, the woman and men on the vid-meet could see clearly that the President had just committed flat out conspiracy, High Felony and the purchase of a child-slave for the purpose of religious indenture. As the program went on, the boy’s inhumane life of constant beatings, torments, debasement, degradations and multiple attempts by drugs, weapons and mercenaries to kill him once and for all. On the side, the newscast also showed just how violent and stubborn the child had become from his fourth year of live and on.

Poison grenades.

The kid had built his first lethal weapons at age 4; he always favored acid since.

The highly ranked, militarily experienced adults could only watch in powerless despair at how a gentle, caring innocent child had seen his mind broken and the pieces twisted, his soul warped until it was questionable if he was still human anymore. The superb heights of medicine and cybernetics he reached would have made any of them proud to claim him as their son, but the underlying capacities of the chemicals, medical drugs, implants and computers he created were sending waves of worry and doubts through the conference attendees.

In particular, the conception of a proprietary mathematical system no one else used, the creation of synthetic crystals to use as chips and boards in computers and the new servers he had crafted all gave them pause. Anyone with that much raw computing power was automatically suspect in the eyes of all the many agencies that kept any country safe and stable. The fact the machines were designed and optimized for using the same neural energies & frequencies as the human brain so as to awaken comatose patients or heal significant cerebral injuries was an entire other basket of crabs.

As the story developed, another large doubt emerged; money.

The young man had accumulated a personal fortune that passed the hundred million dollars just with Wolenbahn Electronics but the CNN reporters had unearthed the clear link between Lucas and Wise Apothecary & Chemists, starting from his owning Wise Manor in Buffalo. The fact that the medication & surgical tools company took its orders from the teenager for six years already was
demonstrated positively with multiple formularies from diverse government levels and services across the states of New York, Massachusetts, and many others, including canadian provinces where WAC had production and distribution facilities.

Then the familial link to the Wise Bloodline.

The generational chart was shown, publicly proving the cosanguine and borderline incestuous situation between all the generations in the clan. Any doubts that Lucas could legally claim the company and properties were put to rest when the announcer explained that the boy had actually used his trust fund money to purchase Ramshackle Manor at age 8, followed by Wise Manor at age 9 and THAT was the event that gave him ownership and authority over the entirety of the Wise Heritage and its medication producer.

The teen's total number of buildings and employees was mindboggling.

The full list of his clients for WEI was a red flag of important names and companies that none of the agency directors wanted to call an enemy. The damned World Bank certainly wouldn't give them any favors if they tried to damage or put out of commission their favorite service provider. And the dollar amount he had billed them over the last five years was even more worrisome as it meant that he was deeply embedded into the structure and decisional offices of the institution. That his San Francisco offices for WEI were located inside a WB building was a publicly visible proof of favor from the highest levels of the Bank. The rental agents for those properties could never sign an agreement with a new client unless the head office had given the permission for it, and that meant a chain of face-to-face contacts, handshakes and getting invited to the backyard barbecues of some seriously exalted people.

As the clock marked 18:58pm and the first hour of the special broadcast wound down, the members of the conference muted their TV's to concentrate on their meeting. Several had pale sickly features and were fighting internally against the upsurge of bile that wanted to come out.

Agent Booth spoke first, giving them a critical piece of information that surprised them. "In the spirit of open cooperation between us, I have to tell you that Lucas Wolenczak is not unknown to my partners at the Jeffersonian Museum. Misses Angela Montenegro uses a holographic projector to recreate the bodies and faces of deceased victims whose cases are referred by my office to the museum's department of Forensic Anthropology for resolution. The 'Angelator' is actually based upon a prototype designed and built by Ms Montenegro a decade ago but WEI has, since year 2016, collaborated to the development and upgrading of the system. This was possible because WEI actually purchased a large percentage of the rights on the device and they act as sales agent to propagate the technology. As such, the FBI in Washington DC has bought about a dozen of these to place them in the civil defense bunkers that would command the city's reactions in case of area emergencies or invasion."

Commander Ford jumped in after that. "Aboard SeaQuest we have five, maybe six, of these consoles and they are hard-linked directly to the server backbone and also serve to manage the ship's internal reactions to emergencies or invasion. One console is in the captain's quarters, the other is in the med-bay's conference room. I don't remember where the others are, or what they are dedicated to. As far as I was aware, they were just glorified Internex monitors."

The CIA director piped in "We bought some of those consoles through our civilian investment and support company In-Q-Tel, about three years ago. We took them apart and were impressed by the hardware and software alike. We have actually been buying some to equip CIA field offices and local command bunkers in the hot zones of active conflicts. I know that here in Langley we have about two dozen installed, especially in the design and crafting departments where they make the
tradecraft tools to assist our agents on missions. We haven't seen anything to make us doubt the value
or safety of these devices. They certainly have shown their usefulness to everyone who employed
them."

Since nobody else had anything to add, admiral Noyce moved the meeting to the critical subjects.
"What are your thoughts on the stability of the president at the moment? And the stability of the
office itself?"

The secretary of defense passed a weary hand over the lower part of his face as he sighed deeply,
afraid of what he was about to say out loud. "I don't think we have a president at this time. We don't
have anybody from Justice on the line, but I have had contacts earlier today just after the search &
seizure warrants were executed. The consensus in the DOJ is that Trump has shot himself in the face
and will not be sworn in come January. In fact, he could get booted before Christmas, the way things
are moving so fast & hard in the media and corridors of the Capitol. I have received confirmation
from the leaders of both the Senate and House that they are emitting a recall of all members for an
emergency session of the full Congress and the diverse Justice and Ethics committees have scheduled
emergency sessions as well, but for later after the Congress muster. At this point, people, I think we
should assume that even the Republicans will not save this asinine fool from the consequences of his
madness, and we are headed into choppy waters, in the most optimistic of circumstances."

The secretary of the Navy asked the 'unholy' question that no one in active office dared to put out for
public consideration. "Are we going to talk about the storm clouds looming over us all, or are we
going to gleefully ignore them like just another winter dusting of white snot? If the bloody fool in the
Oval Office gets kicked out of the Chair, you all know what the private polls and tactical surveys say
will happen to his fanatical grassroots followers across the Nation! How bad will this devolve to?
Because at this point, based on the intel supplied inside the Navy's branches, I have to recommend
we enact the protocol 'Noah's Ark' at the close of this meeting and tell our people to bunker their
offices, homes and gather relatives at defensible positions to weather out the civil unrest that is sure to
happen."

The Director of the UEO's Military Police Joseph Michaels rose a finger to get attention."What are
you people talking about? I come from Canada, not the US federal apparatus. I was never briefed
about local internal mechanisms concerning possible civil unrest inside the member states, especially
since I'm in charge of the MP's, it wasn't my bailiwick anyways. I'm sure the other UEO delegates
would like to know as well."

It was Leon Vance, Director of NCIS, who answered the other man's question. "The protocol
'Noah's Ark" refers to the christian bible's retelling of Noah's legend. He is supposed to have built the
biggest wooden boat in history to gather a mated pair of each animal alive to save their species from
the planet spanning storms, floods and earthquakes that were prophesized to happen in his lifetime.
Ever since the election of president Obama in 2008, the multiple service branches of the US military
and federal agencies have kept a gimlet eye on the moods and actions of several subsets of the
internal population of the USA. In the last 12 years, we have seen a dramatic, catastrophic really,
increase in the levels of interpersonal violence, destructive crimes against the community and what
can only be qualified as 'domestic terrorism' by ultra-nationalist cultists and militias. As such, from
2012 onwards, the US military has, in conjunction with all its partners under the Homeland Security
banner and the CIA's network, established protocols to help all of our servicemen secure and protect
their families in case of American society and government falling into irreversible anarchy. This
includes a set of automated encrypted messages, recall dates and points of contacts to reestablish the
chain of command in each service or agency. It also includes using the money from the seizure of
assets of smugglers and terror cells to finance defensive upgrades, bunkers and supply caches in
certain key buildings where the workers and families of these services and agencies could fall back to
obtain assistance and survive in a protected communal enclave of people they know and trust
already. In some select cases, funds were allocated to design and build civil protection shelters in less visited areas of existing military bases to help gather and shelter the families against unrest and rioting. In other cases, some of those old navy bases that were shut down over budgeting issues in the last 30 years were analyzed and put through a highly secretive project to completely reorganize them as hidden defensive enclaves to be un-shuttered when the country came apart."

Michaels nodded his head in thanks, saying "Okay, I can see the logic behind this, especially given the way millions of people reacted to Obama's first election in 2008 and the second time in 2012. We get to Trump's first term in 2016 and the white supremacists going nuts in public, with all the blowback that caused... And now the reelection vote that a lot of people, some of them in your own intelligence community, say was rigged remotely by Russia's hacker farm in Saint Petersburg... Yeah... I can see how you all thought you would need to secure your workforce and their dependents to keep the most minimal level of policing and border defense going. It just says a lot about your country's politics and government that you had to do this in secret behind the president, Congress and everybody."

Several snorts and sneers were his answer. Most of the people on the screen were hard working, honest men who had served under the flag in the trenches and they had not time to waste on Washington's brand of circus sideshows that stood in lieu of actual governance and management. They had done what they could to mitigate the damages to their own crews, servicemen and dependents because that's what they were limited to. Even by grabbing the cash-flow smuggled into the USA by criminals and augmenting the fines and penalties for frauds, especially the Internex sales scammers going around, it just wasn't enough money, manpower and time to do it all, especially since it was done secretly and there was a lot of written laws that declared what they were doing illegal or treasonous. It was the lot they had been dealt in life, and they were dealing with it as best any of them could.

The secretary of Defense proclaimed "We are presently, by my authority and call, under 'Noah's Ark' protocol, to be initiated at the close of this conference. May whichever god you believe in have mercy on your souls and those of your servicemen and their families. Noyce, continue the briefing."

The venerable admiral took a deep breath to steady himself before he issued orders couched as polite suggestions. Since most of these people did not in fact work for him nor under his chain of command, he had to tread carefully. "Directors Vance and Webber, I need you to cooperate on finding Lucas Wolenczak and setting a bodyguard detail on him. You can take the opportunity to take his official deposition while you cover him against attacks and intimidation, which we know there will be plenty of in the coming days and weeks. His being in Canada for now will protect him only so long. The actual investigation, especially the president's part, I gladly leave to all of you."

Turning his eyes to face his old friend and the man besides him in the monitor, he was short and clear about what he needed done. "Captain Bridger, commander Ford, I want the SeaQuest commissioned, supplied and out in blue waters by the end of next week, on Wednesday at the very latest. You will patrol the Gulf of Mexico until told otherwise. The moment the DXS or NCIS agents contact us with positive results on their mission to find and cover the kid, I want him moved to the ship and into international waters, away from potential fanatics and mercenaries that Lawrence could have hired."

Giving the NSA Director Horatio Derrel the gimlet eye, William said "We need better intel on the entire family's dynamics and just how far off the beaten roads each living member is willing to go. We need to find out all the contacts that Lawrence and Cynthia have in the criminal underbelly of America and elsewhere and then backtrack it to their purses and hands giving out the orders. At that point, we nab them and pile up as many charges as we can apply to each. A public, lengthy and detailed trial for each will shore up our legal and moral position when dealing with the Trumpist
zealots and the church-whores in DC. Does anyone else have anything to add or propose before we close?"

FBI Director Armand Klepp asked "Are we extending 'whistle-blower' status and protections to this young man if he collaborates with us or are we taking a harder stance that since he fled the scene of the crime, we owe him nothing? As it stands, some of the more right-wing prosecutors will be debating this and I know several state's attorneys that are close to the white nationalist movance that will want him actively prosecuted under the claim that his public declarations and leaving the country have hindered the course of an investigation thus deserving jail time or at least momentously severe fines."

Noyce sneered in contempt at the thought of those depraved sluts-of-the-pews and what they would try to do or commit to derail any investigations into cultist activity and Trump's idiotic traitorous gestures against the established Law of the Land. Such sub-human debris were the best feed for his pigs and he had a foresight that they would be well fed indeed in the coming months. Addressing Klepp's question, he answered tartly "Lucas Wolenczak was victimized on the entire line for his entire life. We are treating him as a minor-aged child who ran away from his home to avoid being killed, maimed or sold off to slavery by his felonious parents. Any White House involvement in the story is secondary to the principal facts; any attempts by cultists, worshipers and Trumpists to focalize the story and the court cases upon – only – the moment of the presidential intervention will find themselves subject to investigation and anything we find will be used to destroy them in public. Anything they say will be checked against the Law and Jurisprudence and you will be charging them with perverting justice, corrupting an active investigation or attempting to pass false laws as real, etc... Do what you have to in order to silence and destroy these bastards, as long as it's based on the Truth and real Law. Does everybody understand the gameboard we're playing on?"

CIA Director Raymond Uthenberg closed the meeting with a blood chilling remark: "And those who think they have the right to operate outside of America's established and settled laws will be accommodated by our good services, just not how they expected nor with the self-aggrandizing results they desired."

All the service and agency director closed their line to turn towards their own people. They had a country defining epoch to manage, and not nearly enough money, men and time to do it right.

Old warhorse saddling up

(NCIS-LA – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 03:12am

East America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 20:12pm

West America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 17:12pm

NCIS west coast - Office of Special Projects

Los Angeles, California, USA

A resounding screech was heard in the underground parking level as the silver Mercedes-Benz 2-door convertible raced into its designated spot, barely managing to stop before colliding with the cement wall at the front of the stall. The door flew open, disgorging the diminutive but firm, athletic shape of Henrietta Lange, Operations Manager, who wasted no time in slamming the door shut so she could run at full tilt through corridors and stairs up to the operations room.
The emergency call had come in as she was sitting in her main living room in her principal Los Angeles residence, called 'Dovecote', and it had scared the bejeezus out of her. Her entire team, minus Mr Callen, had been given several days off to recover from an encounter with a would-be ISIS sympathizer who managed to convince an arabic student at UCLA's biogenics laboratory to take out biologically active reagents to be forwarded to the fighting front in Iraq. The cheap plastic carrying case had been accidentally damaged by gun fire during the take-down and so the agents present had been on medical leave in the hospital for six days of quarantine, following which Hetty had ordered at least 7 days of rest. She had expected them to return on Monday morning, healthy and rested, and eager for some action. She herself had taken the Friday at home to process some of her accumulated paperwork for NCIS central office in quieter surroundings, feeling that Mosley could handle the OSP building just fine by herself.

Then her private emergency line had rung, just before her first sip of the magnificent cocktail she had crafted for herself. Damn! Such a waste of good spirits!

There were no polite phrases exchanged nor any formal platitudes of rank as such video conferences are wont of getting mired in. No; Leon Vance and the secretary of the Navy had both been in attendance and the message was as clear as it was dire.

Civil unrest with potential to devolve into civil war.

The United States of America were heading for a period of major constitutional and political crisis that would result in sustained, most probably violent, manifestations, rioting, civil unrest and maybe even civil war if it lasted long enough to gather momentum that the police forces and national guard units could not contain locally.

Pounding her way up the stairs of the almost empty building in the early evening was not a common sight and the watchman ogled her weirdly as she breezed by him. Or maybe it was the openly worn flak jacket with bandoleer of knives, guns and grenades with plenty of spare clips worn over her usual high class steel gray suit and jewelry. It's not because society was going back to a wilder era of animalesque behavior that she was obliged to let herself get carried along. She had standing in the government and standards need, must, be met at all times. She had even taken the time to put on her matching ivory topped cameo rings that were miniature cavities to hold poison or micro-transmitters in case of 'last call' situations. The broach on her lapel was also ivory and held the multi-switch detonator for all her properties and vehicles, just in case she had been compromised terminally. The necklace of two lines of cultivation pearls dangling from her neck was actually several hundred little balls of liquid explosive sensitive to electricity only, in case she needed to make an exit.

Making sure she was perfectly coiffed and well presented by glancing at her rushing reflection in the mirror that was placed strategically just before entering the Ops Room by her own good care for such cases, she dialed in her PIN and marched into her fiefdom unchallenged. Of course, at this hour, only the night shift surveillance was present and Mosley was in the armory, dealing with a technical issue but she would be coming up fast enough. The nightwatch female tech overlooked the main office, the floating boat shed and several safe-houses around the extended LA metropolitan zone, ready to call alarm in case of breach.

Stunned at seeing her Big Boss (ironic isn't it?) marching in arms with clear intent to cause severe lasting harm unto her opponents, Madeleine Nitter was quickly reminded that Hetty Lange was an old warhorse who'd lived through the Cold War and thrived in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and even done incursions in China's southern regions to destabilize communist efforts to build the rail network needed to support the Viet-Cong. Her exploits in Eastern Europe were legendary because they were so damned heavily classified that it was close to High Treason to even dare ask about it. The elderly woman had been called 'The Duchess of Deception' for her uncanny ability to lie to your face while
seemingly innocent like an angel straight out of Heaven's Pearly Gates. More likely they kicked the
sawn-off devil out in fright at what she could do... Suffice it to say, Ops Manager Lange was
legendary and ruthlessly efficient in ferreting out traitors, moles, rats and all sorts of foreign agitators.
Her network of foreign contacts made her even more worrisome since you couldn't really know from
where her retaliation or support would arrive.

Madeleine swallowed hard as the woman-in-charge passed by her as if she didn't exist and marched
herself over to a cabinet made of black solid tempered steel the thickness of armored personnel
carrier hull plates. She took an old black steel key from under her cravat and leaned forward to set it
in the lock besides the handle. After turning the key both sides, left while turning the handle together
and then right just the key, the heavy cabinet opened. Inside was a set of steel shelves holding pistols
and clips, grenades, knives, sheaths and straps, walkie-talkies, smartphones, tins of bulk dehydrated
vegetable soup mix, tins of coffee, bottles of powdered milk, bags of sugar and old WWII survival
 crackers that seemed to be in the original tin box. Featuring prominently in the cabinet was the
internal side of the door: it was composed of three touchscreen tablets linked to an independent
smartphone and from that a solid coaxial cable ran back to the cabinet and into the concrete wall, to a
hub that sent the signal to antennas on the roof or down to the web servers in the basement. Besides
the smartphone was a simple small device that seemed like just a rectangle of plastic that didn't do
anything but hold the network cables and power cords in order.

Henrietta took the ivory earring off her left ear lobe and touched it to the small, menial plastic cable
holder and all Hell broke loose immediately. Red strobe lights began to flash around the inside of the
building while blue floodlights suddenly illuminated the entire outside perimeter and underground
parking of the compound. The three tablets inset in the cabinet door lit up, flashing columns of
numbers and emails at high speed as the emergency router was warming up to do its fatidic job.

Hetty took a deep breath then spoke out loud in her clear, commanding voice. "This is Special
Supervisory Agent Henrietta Lange, Operations Manager for the NCIS Office of Special Projects in
Los Angeles. To all NCIS agents located in the greater LA zone, on land, on the sea or in the air, this
is a priority message under the protocol 'Noah's Ark'. I repeat, this is Henrietta Lange of NCIS-OSP
in LA; the central office in Washington DC has decreed the activation of protocol 'Noah's Ark'. All
hands on deck, people! We have a storm brewing and we need all personnel, even the retired, the
sick or the physically immobilized but still awake! We have need of you all! Call in on the
established channels and bunker down in your houses until you are contacted back with assignments.
All agents undercover are to scrap their ops and burn their covers! I repeat, 'hot exfil' for all
undercover ops in progress, no exceptions! Everybody in deep cover is to regroup at the central
compound within 48 hours or be declared as compromised and be treated as enemy agents! That is
all. God Bless You and may he have mercy on our nation in its time of turmoil."

Pulling her earring away from the magnetic reader, Hetty waited until a loud beep sounded from the
emergency server to tap one tablet to set the message to repeat every 15 minutes for the next 6 hours
and then every hour after that for 48 hours.

Turning to Madeleine who was now shaking like a leaf, she told the middle-aged female "Would
you be a dear and run to the armory to gear up? We are now in 'Noah's Ark', sweetie. We need to
dress the part and act like it actually matters, don't we now? We wouldn't want the office drones in
DC to think we don't take their institutional criminality and its deleterious effects on american society
lightly. We'd never hear the end of it." she explained in her most urbane tones of voice, as if she was
discussing evening gowns for the Navy officer's yearly ball at the DC Naval Yard.

Poor Agent Nitter could only nod her head vigorously like a bobble head doll before running out of
ops to fly down the stairs, all the way to the basement armory. She would stop by the changing
rooms to switch from her loose fitted dress into her spare jeans, though. Wearing a flack vest and
hanging weapons all over a skirt and blouse just wasn't practical, even though Nell Jones did it often enough to have developed some interesting skills at it. Madeleine would also stop by the toilet as she was very near to pissing herself in raw unfettered fright about what was happening outside their walls. She dearly hoped she could reach the washroom before her mind caught up to events and her body's autonomous reactions kicked in.

{ SQ } - { Ah, fuck me! } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 03:23am

East America; 20:23pm

West America; 17:23pm

Grisha Aleksandrovich Nikolaev Callen ('G' for everybody), special agent of NCIS for Los Angeles OSP, expert infiltrator, armsman and driver was most decidedly brassed off like a brand new staircase banister. Two whole months of work undercover, and deep cover with barely any contacts home at that, had just been thrown down the toilet because the idiotic moron-in-charge in DC had yet again suffered another fit of Power-Grab-Mania in full view of the public.

Enslaving children!

On the US Government's orders and paying with bloody tax-payers' money to boot!

Zzzzzzzzing! Crash!

"Ah, fuck me with a damned phone pole, why don't you!" Grisha screamed out loud as the car he was driving at break-neck speed did a wide side-slide from the asphalt into the grassy band that separates the sidewalk from the street. It wasn't the skidding vehicle though that had him screaming at the top of his lungs. No; that he had in perfect control as he was driving said car with expert skills and long, hard earned experience at 'defensive' driving through Los Angeles traffic. The cause of his screams was the fact his right-side window and windshield had exploded into sharp flying glass bits in his face courtesy of the 'métèque' in the car chasing him at similar speeds but with far less skills and grace.

The fat italiano stereotype-of-the-day was driving a severely modified version of a low class Honda jeep from the 1990's that must have a Hemi 350 under the hood to reach that speed while carrying some inch thick steel armor plates all around that certainly weren't factory default. And who the FUCK ever heard of installing twin Browning M2HB cal.50 machine guns on a redneck turret on top of a damned Honda? Didn't people have any sense of decency in organized crime anymore? Couldn't they steal a pickup like a Ford or Chevy somewhere and keep it Kosher like normal people?

Zzzzzzzzing!

Suffice it to say that two full sized machine guns spitting each upwards of 550 rounds a minute at his getaway car wasn't doing any good for the resale value of it. At least, it was a cheap corvette taken from the police impound lot from a bunch of stuff a Colombian drug dealer had when he was arrested for trafficking coke and peddling human flesh to brothels. Callen would cry for the car's fate but it was now the third spray & pray of hot molten steel shells that passed in front of his nose and he was getting pissed. Bad enough the gino at the wheel had no taste in rides, but letting the girl G had been romancing as his 'in-track' to the fatso's inner circle wield the guns against him was pushing the limits a whole damned lot! The bitch was vengeful like Kensi on a sugar crave!

Zzzzzzzzing!
Came the fourth salvo of cal.50 shells, chewing through the rear right wing, rear bumper and parts of the trunk. And she was shooting tracers, of all things! In broad daylight! Tracers! Who in this country showed that woman to shoot tracing shots like that in mother-bleepin' daylight? If Sam Hanna were here to see this, he'd probably try to add charges of 'criminal incompetence in the use and discharge of military weapons' on top of everything they were gonna get. Then he would force them to go through boot camp for real so they learned what to shoot and how. G shook his head as he skidded on a red light towards the left, sending the car's ass going rightwards and up so he could speed his way along the boulevard they had come to.

Callen floored the gas pedal, trying to get some headway on the straight line sprint since the cursed Japanese trash-on-wheels behind him was almost as fast and maneuverable in between the industrial buildings and alleyways where the firefight had started. The weight added by the armor plates should slow them just enough for the agent to make his escape and, if he timed this right, get some help too.

Zzzzzzzzing!

As both cars sped down the boulevard, other cars were pushed around or willingly moved out of the street altogether when the fifth salvo of heavy ordinance was heard to lash forward at the fleeing federal agent. With the sound and muzzle flash telling the crowd what was happening clearly enough, everybody was trying to dodge out of the way thus clearing the way for Callen to gas-up and quicken his pace. That last batch had chewed through the trunk, exploded the rear window completely, and parts of the rear bench. A few shells had even punched through the front passenger seat and floor with a great shower of cushion foam and sparks.

Ah, fuck! The bench and passenger seat were now on fire and belching brackish smoke!

"Who the damned Hells shoots tracers in damned daylight!" G exploded verbally as he tried to push the car faster to escape his foes.

Zzzzzzzzing! Clink! Clink!

Luckily for Callen, the Browning guns were voracious and the space to store ammunition inside the small Honda jeep's home built turret was very limited. After shooting close to 3,000 shells on each gun, the woman wound up with empty boxes and nothing left to fire at her 'estranged boyfriend' to punish him for his treachery against her dreams of a big Italian wedding and six kids before she was in her forties. Now, the damned male puta de via (street whore) was getting away and she couldn't stop him anymore. Despite her screams of anger and her fists pounding on the roof of the jeep above the driver's seat, her fat slob of a brother slowed down then turned the car back towards the fisheries' docks district to escape the incoming cop cars. They would find a way to catch up to this cum-stain in the motel bed sheets at some future point. He lived in LA and there were enough criminals, poor, destitute and desperate people in this crap-hole town that somebody would accept some petty cash in exchange for giving up the dead man's address. It was just a question of patience, nothing more.

G was breathing easier as he realized that his pursuer had abandoned the hunt. He swerved into the parking lot of a strip mall to ditch the clearly burning car and all the unwanted attention it was garnering at high speed. Since he had no bags other than his smartphone and the contents of his pockets to worry about, the middle-aged man jumped out of the flaming wreck when it was down to 10mph and stepped right into a long paced jog to reach the boulevard sidewalk and the streetlamp with the metal square attached to it. Barely seconds later, the municipal bus came to a stop and he climbed in, flashed his badge to the driver and ordered the man "Drive in a straight line until I tell you. Call your dispatch to tell them you're skipping about two dozen stops by order of federal law enforcement and they need an extra bus on the line to cover it. I'll give you the number for my agency to contact them for the payments."
Just as he was sitting in the bus, his phone went off. Checking the number, he saw it was Sam calling him to get news. After a very short, terse chat, he hung up and began counting the street corners and bus stops to not miss his junction. After just 20 minutes in the bus, Callen dropped off and hailed a cab that he had seen was parked nearby as it dropped off a client. The NCIS agent gave the driver an address that would bring him to a small strip mall near where he passed in the morning on his way to work at the OSP compound, when he had office days, that was. He would wait there for Sam to pick him up while calling around to see if his other friends were gearing up in response to the 'Noah's Ark' protocol being deployed.

{ SQ } - { Hot Damn! } - { SQ } 

Western Africa; 03:28am

East America; 20:28pm

West America; 17:28pm

Samuel 'Sam' Hanna, US Marine Corps, SEAL Team, expert marksman and demolitions buff, was in a right proper snit, to say it honestly. He had barely put his new ocean-faring boat 'The Clambake' back to order after three long days of doing a binge of Do-It-Yourself cleaning and renovations just to keep himself busy and away from the bottles when the whole bloody mudball went up in flames all around him. Hearing Hetty's voice coming out of the ship's comm gear as well as his cellphone and the public address system he had rigged around the boat to hear when a call came in or he wanted to listen to some radio music during his work had almost given him a coronary.

At his age! A bloody heart attack!

Then again, if you knew who his Boss was, you'd understand that hearing her 'dulcet tones' come out of thin air when you're sitting on the common man's throne in deep communion with your 'gut feelings' about what restaurant to call for your late supper could cause an infarction in the strongest of men.

Sam Hanna would admit honestly that he wasn't THAT strong or durable.

His wife's death a few months back had proven that to him. As had the repeated benders and sleepless nights looking over the ocean as he sat in the boat's wheelhouse, with a bottle of booze in hand, thinking about sailing out into the night and never coming back.

Now this.

He had never been a drunkard before Michelle was murdered. Now, his kids didn't recognize their father anymore. Neither did he. The man in the mirror had become a stranger to him. If it weren't for G sticking around so much to hold his hand, helping him through the grief and changes, he might have already cast off and disappeared in the sunset, abandoning his kids and relatives without looking back.

And now this shit dropped on them, at the worse time in his life.

The 'Noah's Ark' protocol.

The 'America is flushing itself down the toilet at flanking speed' survival procedures that were put in place by the central administrators in Washington DC in late 2008 when president Obama had been lawfully elected. Back then, many federal agencies had polled their own workforce and seen truly worrisome results involving raw backwards racism and flat-out contempt driven by the most base and regressist religious fanatics coming out of all sorts of churches. The directors had secretly
assembled in a conference and ordered a series of national public surveys, done extensively in each state. The results of those systematic polls done in May 2009 were worrying so they started planning. After the Obama reelection of 2012, a new set of national surveys were done and those were beyond frightful. The country was about to tear itself apart into blocks determined by race, religion and, in some sectors, by private territories declaring independence on the basis of money and having more hired guns than what local police and the national guard could fight against.

Then, after 8 years of progressive liberal democrats in power, the tides of rage, fear, racism, religiosity and contempt for all things Washington DC coming from the farms and forests of the deep south and heartland of America allowed Donald J. Trump to surf through the other republican contestants. The ill-run democratic campaign, rather complacent with Hillary Clinton as its candidate, never saw the Trump effect tidal-wave coming and got blindsided across most of the country. At that point, the population was teetering on the edge of an abyss that they seemed to welcome with open arms.

In late 2016, just before the elections, a private polling firm did a survey of the USA that revealed the startling reality that would make a Trump victory happen. Some 49% of the general population aged 18 years and more thought seriously that it would take a genuine 'civil war' fought with guns against the US Federal Government, the US Army and the 'godless, un-patriotic drones in bureaucracy' to reclaim their country for the 'True People' of America. The crushing majority of those polled thought this civil war would happen in their lifetime and destroy the so-called 'modern state' thus returning the country back to a mode of 'Pure' christian faith based governance with priests being elected to high offices to insure this purity would never deviate again.

Trump, that counter-fucked amateurish church-despot wannabe, had been elected by a lot less than a quarter of the popular vote. And then he got reelected again just weeks ago, despite higher turnouts and several states going 'full blue' this time. Could they not see the electronic voting machines had been hacked by the Russians who wanted to keep their patsy in place? Idiots!

And now, because the geriatric bastard thought he could make deals about peddling human lives and flesh simply because 'the kid's father wanted it so I said yes' the entire country was gonna burn. Oh joy!

Sam finished his commiserations on the toilet before washing his hands and walking up to the wheelhouse to grab the wired phone from the dashboard next to the wooden steering wheel. Punching the keys to a number he knew by heart for many years now, he linked up to an automated telephony server that had a message pre-recorded for him in case such events happened. The message, in Eric Beale's voice, told him what to do, who to contact and when to present himself at OSP compound to get his marching orders in person from whoever would be the Ops Manager at that time.

After writing down all the necessities of his recall procedure, Sam punched in the number for G's phone, even though he was in deep cover at this time. His personal phone would have carried the OSP emergency message with a specific ringtone to warn him it was a catastrophic situation so his cover would be blown and he'd be on the run. The black skinned, bald man took out a spare Glock pistol from the cupboard under the ship's dashboard and checked the slide action as the line picked up and a slightly out of breath Callen answered live.

"Where do you want me to pick you up from?" Sam asked without preambles or letting his friend any time for the usual banter when they talked out of work. Given the abbreviated answer and prompt hangup he received, he figured that Callen's exfiltration was indeed the 'hot' variety. Damn! Why did the guy have all the fun when Sam was rotting away in his boat? He'd have to talk to Hetty
about that.

Picking up his emergency go-bag, a few more knives, pistols, a shotgun, several boxes of munitions and the extra bag of edibles, the ex-marine toured the boat to lock and secure everything, lower the blinds and then stuffed everything in his car for the long arduous road ahead. This night was just beginning and it would get nasty before dawn, he could just feel it.

{ SQ } - { Tears } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 03:28am

East America; 20:28pm

West America; 17:28pm

Kensington Blye sighed softly in soul deep satisfaction as she lay besides her friend, brother, lover and fiancé Martin Deeks after a very soft, languorous bout of lovemaking. Placing a hand over Marty's hand, she caressed his right forearm that he had draped over her as he spooned her. His breath on her nape warmed her entire soul and his left arm was under her head, serving as her muscular pillow. The thumb of his right hand was gently, playfully, moving up and down on her left breast, sending quite exquisite sensations into her whole body. Her partner was silent, thoughtful despite the pleasuring situation.

She could understand his mindset all too well.

While they did have some very athletic muscular bodies and enjoyed the more physically styled versions of sexual play, an occasional night of extra-vanilla softness like this one really helped to recharge their emotional batteries even more than it was organically pleasant. As they were both NCIS special agents, both 'feds' in an epoch where law enforcement at the national level was either adulated or reviled as servants of 'The Beast' in DC without any sorts of middle ground, their days were incredibly strenuous psychologically and they needed all the comfort they could find. More and more, the ordinary public was less polite, less civil and far less inclined to help police or tell on criminals, often seeing anything that defies federal agents as a good thing for the common man's overall life.

Since the death of Michelle Hanna, Sam's wife of two decades, a few months back, things at work had begun to fall apart around her. In truth though, it had started collapsing to pieces a lot longer back than that for Marty and his stress levels were just not coming down anymore. Whether they were eating his favorite food, watching his favorite movie or making love in the more playful, physically demanding ways that he normally preferred, he couldn't unwind his tensions and fears anymore.

Behind her closed eyes, Kensi could see exactly what would have happened to her beloved other half if she had died from her spine injury almost a year ago. He would have gone the same way Sam did, but with weed rather than alcohol given his surfer passions, and would have eventually gone surfing so stoned out that he would have willingly drowned himself in the waves to join her. Then she almost died again at the hands of rogue CIA agent Ferris and his multiple mercenaries. Getting kidnapped then threatened with having her leg cut off still haunted her when she fell asleep alone, without Marty to keep her warm and safe, to fight off the demons that lay in wait inside her soul for when she was defenseless. Add to that the fallacious inquests into Hetty's management, the OSP itself and NCIS at large that had resulted in her old mentor's temporary resignation, mysterious disappearance and similarly mysterious return that was still unexplained.

No, the last year hadn't been good to her, and Marty had it worse.
Even her full recovery from her spinal cord injury and physiotherapy had only put a cork into one hole in a dam full of large yawning gashes. Unless they had a whole construction crew and a cement factory, patching that dike to close off the flow of crud and misery would not happen. Not with just them, not the way their lives, emotions and work environment were being managed. At this point, even the comic relief of their two mothers fussing over them buying a house together and living as an officially engaged couple no longer distracted them from the hardships and dangers anymore.

Just after they had become aware of how deep a pit of depression Sam had fallen in, Marty had confessed to her his fears and his utter despair at the fact they were now essentially directionless, their compass broken with the needles used to impale them right in the heart. Marty had asked out loud the fâticid question; could they still work in ANY law enforcement agency at all given the sorts of dangers going around the streets that they already faced every day. NCIS faced the sorts of threats that would make people dig bunkers under their basements and sequester themselves for centuries rather than face the atrocious monstrosities she, Deeks and the OSP team had to deal with as their daily fare.

What they faced two weeks ago with that bio-terrorist was exactly the type of nightmare she meant.

Speaking of Deeks, she really needed to find some time to go buy him a nice little something made out of red meat and bourbon BBQ sauce. That idea he just had of playfully nibbling on her nape was quite inspired and she just had to encourage that with as much vigor as he was showing her. THAT wouldn’t be happening if she tried to cook it herself; the team had faced gas less toxic than her cooking so call-in delivery or take-out ready meals from the grocery shop it was. Not that she complained since those made ‘washing’ the dishes so much easier, too. After all, Styrofoam was made to be junked and wiping down the table afterwards was no biggie, even for a domestically challenged girl like her.

What? Those few years she had lived on the streets in adolescence, homeless and surviving on a slew of petty crimes to stay fed and out of prostitution rings did not conduce to having a good set of domestic manners. Later as a young adult she became a US Marine trained for harsh environments, driving multiple vehicles, sniping and planting bombs, not playing housewife. You can bet the FLETC training obligatory for NCIS employment certainly didn’t include household skills or familial life skits. Not that it mattered. Marty wasn’t the type to be upset by this part of her personality, especially since he could turn into a right slob himself when his mood took a darker turn, like during the harder parts of her return home.

Ah! The joys of conjugal bliss...

Kensi was just in the midst of truly enjoying the buccal ministrations of her lover as he kissed his way down her spine as a perfectly recognizable manner to ask for a do-over when cataclysm struck their unstable household. All of their home’s wired phones, smartphones, burn cellphones and the emergency short wave radio base-camp station in the office on the ground floor started ringing together with a very specific ringtone that was not to be used for anything else.

NCIS had activated the 'Noah's Ark' protocol. America was collapsing.

Marty made Kensi turn around towards him as he pulled himself up to look deeply into her eyes and say aloud what they were both thinking in synchronous realization.

"It's too late" Marty whispered softly as tears began sliding down his face, despair and resignation written all over his features and posture. "They won't let anybody quit while that's going on. And after, they'll put in stop-gap measures and departure delay clauses to keep up the troop strengths to en-dike the troubles. We might even see a conscription for the regular troops or at least the national guard." Weeping without shame as he had always been open about his emotions, the man wrapped
his arms around the woman he loved enough to be married with her and let loose the body shaking
sobs that showed he knew they would most likely not make it out of this mess alive and whole.

After a half hour during which they both cried themselves out, they wiped their faces and climbed
into the shower together to get cleaned up for a long night of dodging harm and shooting back at
shadows that even Hetty wouldn't be able to see coming. After they had dried off, they dressed in the
most sturdy combat clothes they had and put on the plethora of knives, guns, grenades and flak
armor they could while still being mobile. Once fully prepared, they picked up their phones and each
listened to the customized messages they had received. Recorded by Eric Beale a while back, the
messages told them how to call-in to OSP for the recovery meeting date when they would get their
orders.

After logging on to the NCIS-OSP server to confirm they had gotten the 'Noah's Ark' recall message,
they took the time to recover and pile up everything that could help long term survival in a lawless
country and brought it down to their professionally built wartime shelter in the basement, under the
4-car garage that was attached to the house. After they did two passes around their home to make
sure all the usable stuff was in the bunker, they brought down their tradable valuables to the storage
lockers in the normal part of the basement. As they were more free with their hands now, they called
their mothers, warning them to pack to come live here, all four together for the foreseeable future.

After giving the most minimal explanations, the couple walked the house one last time to lock down
the window shutters and doors, upped the security system to almost-lethal level then exited through
the inner door that accessed the enclosed secure garage. They took both cars in case they got orders
that would separate them later on or, more probably, one car got damaged so badly they would need
the spare at hand to escape with their lives and supplies.

About three hours later in the mid-evening, both older women would arrive with packed cars and use
a set of special keys with microchips and radio frequency tags to unlock the heavy-duty locks on the
garage's single panel up-swing door to have access to the secured emplacement. They would use the
night to watch the news for signs of what triggered the national melt-down as they took their
emergency packs to make themselves a semi-permanent lodging. As the scribbled note on the fridge
door had said, "The entire country was flushing itself down the crapper at F-1 race car speeds; keep
the house locked down, have a gun & knife on your belt and NEVER answer the door to someone
you don't personally know." The two scared, anxious parents would follow the instructions from
their children and hope they were contacted before dawn to at least know they lived and on the way
back.

Eric Beale was having an out-of-body experience. Not in a spiritual way, not from getting drunk,
stoned or sedated for surgery. No, he was hearing his own accursed voice coming out of his
cellphone with a string of code, a time and authorization password to log into the NCIS-OSP
telephony server to confirm he had been made aware of the activation of THE worse protocol in the
arsenal of NCIS. Well, the worse that they could emit while still having a semblance of a country or
some small measure of society to save and protect. If multiple nuclear strikes or a pandemic-grade
bio-strike happened, nothing they had would recover from that type of a mess anyways so no
protocols had been established for them. It would be survival of the fittest followed by survival of the
most cohesive groups. Good organization and plentiful supplies didn't give you diddly-squat when
there was no loyalty, reliability or trust to be had inside a community. So it was those groups held by family loyalty, religious creed or just a strong-man or charismatic type of leader that would do well and pick up the well tended supplies that teams without cohesion or stability had hoarded then fought over until they self-destructed.

Although, in the current situation, they weren't all that far from dog-eat-dog anyways.

Raising his eyes to watch his girlfriend of almost a year, Nell Jones, seated across the table from him, he wondered what her reaction would be. She was NCIS but still had many contacts in the NSA and there was a chance that this specific agency would try to strong-arm her back into their service if the situation was grave enough over several months. Passed an entire year and Eric would bet that they would try to have sister agencies like NCIS closed and folded into either them or Homeland Security to cut down the administrative levels and have less directors redundantly deciding the same decisions about the same stuff as was the case presently. The kind of separate jurisdictions and virtual legality fences that were endemic of the Washingtonian way of management would never survive against prolonged hostile action directly inside US territory. Especially with the government's own bureaucracy already viewed as the cause of the problems as so many millions of citizens thought.

Eric and Nell knew the classified surveys very well. They had to refer to them when preparing the monthly threat assessment cartography for Hetty upon which they indicated all the hate groups, criminal gangs and foreign agitators. The number of white supremacists, fanatical religious cults and heavily armed, bunkered 'sovereign citizen' militias had exponentialized since Eric had begun working for NCIS in LA almost a decade ago.

Nell often told him and Hetty, in the privacy of the armory when it was empty, that her NSA contacts had also never thought such a radical increase in the domestic levels of hate-mongering, nation dismantling rhetoric and weapons trafficking would occur anytime before the 2050's. They were seeing stats that resembled the numbers in poor African and Arabic nations far too closely for comfort at any level of either agencies. It was at the point that even the damned CIA was having to resort to open bribery and threats of black helicopters paying people a visit at night to get information out of some sectors of the actual USA itself! In their own backyard!

Nell looked up from her phone into the worried green eyes of her best male friend and tried to effect a smile to comfort him. It came out as more of a grimace, which he nodded at, acknowledging that there was no making this situation better.

They were both at Nell's apartment, in a rather ordinary district of LA since she wasn't a superstar and couldn't afford luxury. Thankfully, the devastating wildfires of late 2017 had caused so much damages that several large tracts of Los Angeles had to be leveled and then rebuilt, thus creating a lot of new housing that wasn't mega-mansions or shuttered luxury condo towers. Nell's building was only a year old and not completely rented out yet, so it was rather quiet and private. They could have a barbecue on the patio and be the only tenants active on the face of the edifice at this point of the day.

The two friends had been given the Friday off by Hetty so they came here last evening to spent a cozy, intimate, long 3 day weekend before going back to OSP on Monday morning. While they hadn't been in the field to suffer the gas attack like Sam, Marty, Kensi and Anna, they had seen it first hand then served as their virtual lifelines while they recovered in the hospital's quarantine chambers. Eric and Nell might have been physically safe and fine, their minds and emotions were anything but. Even Mosley had been worried about them all week, and that was saying something as the woman wasn't exactly close to either of them like Hetty was. Still, the Assistant-Director had not only agreed to their furloughs, she had seemed satisfied about it too.
Anyways, the two friends had thought they would have a quiet period to decompress and purge the buffers of all the crapulence they had witnessed in the last few months and now...

No such luck.

Giving the flat a cursory look, the friends convened that since they both lived in rather ordinary apartments without much clutter, it would be easy to set up Nell's flat in lock-down then go over to Eric's place to do the same before heading out to OSP office right away. Even though their call-to-muster was set for somewhere 48 hours later, they would be needed much before that. They were part of the planning group and, despite nobody knowing it except a few high-level directors and AD's, they also held the keys and codes to several caches of supplies, weapons and data vaults scattered around the greater Los Angeles area so as to decentralize NCIS operatives and make the system harder to take out. Having multiple targets to attack was a pain, and each location could field mobile units to support or succor the others at need since each bunkered building had a large garage with a full mechanic station and fuel depot to feed 8 cars for a month. Instinctively, Eric and Nell both knew that the bolt-holes were gonna get un-shuttered tonight and probably never close down again.

Riley's evening gets really bad

(Alice Cooper – Poison)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 05:15am

East America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 22:15pm

West America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 19:15pm

Stanford township, cheap 2-star motel

Silicon Valley, California, USA

After taking a long slow time to eat their food and watch the news stories unfolding about their erstwhile mark and the web of corruption radiating out of the World Power Project (WPP), the team had wound down for the evening. Since their person of interest was out of the country and he wasn't a criminal or terrorist, there were no plans to follow him up north. It wasn't as if he were an urgent target to be neutralized at all costs like Murdoch, for example.

Jack was out for a walk in the chilly evening air and possibly a beer at a student bar just to pass some of their useless down time until they had linkup tonight. Bozer was out shopping for some travel snacks, a few miscellany they needed for the trip and Mac's bottle of ibuprofen was running empty so he would get a new one too. Angus had already clocked-out and should stay asleep until around 22:30pm when he would wake up to eat his dinner and participate in the call to HQ. If he were out sick, Matty would probably insist he get to their usual hospital the moment he got back to LA. Not that Riley thought that idea was all bad. She liked Mac, he was a good steady friend to her and his recurring brain issues were becoming worrisome for all of them.

Riley frowned as she set her two laptops and three cellphones, two of which were burners, on the rickety table with a wired networking hub, a signal blocker/scrambler, a solid mini parabolic antenna the size of a dinner plate and finally a custom-built device created by one of her tech-head buddies per her exacting specifications.

Riley grit her teeth in frustration at the one big limitation she had; parts. She could program the hell out of anything as long as the physical device existed already but she could not build it from scratch.
Assemble chips on a motherboard yes, when the proper slots were already present on the circuit panel to be fitted with the necessary parts, but she couldn't mix metals, plastics and crystals to create her own chips or circuits. She had studied, by herself mostly, a lot of mathematics and some basic electronics and electrical systems but she was above all a coder, a software geek, not a hardware builder like some of her friends could do. If she had a catalog of parts, devices and apps, she could build a custom system from that but not go any deeper. It wasn't usually a limitation on her job or a problem during Phoenix missions, but today she felt as if she was playing catch-up.

The research Bozer and her had done during the last three days had come back to haunt her in a bad way. She was now certain she knew who had hacked her, and if she was right, she was in hot water. Lucas Andrew Wolenczak.

The little 16 year old guy they were trying to contact. At first, she had made the same mistake that everybody did when they encountered the name and face of the teenaged genius; she put him in a category and subliminally ignored the rest of what he was. She first saw his exceptional medical qualifications and blinded herself to his cybernetics and programming abilities. And those were damned good, too! The number of mathematics, programming and hardware building diplomas at his name were almost scary, but when you added the chemistry, pharmacology, neurology and psychiatry training on top of it all...

Well, lets just say it painted a portrait of somebody she didn't really want to mess with if her team could avoid it. Riley herself always preferred working in the shadows, hidden deep in the anonymity of the Dark Web and shielded by her bot-net. Against this guy, those tactics would only work so long before he caught up to her and her tricks.

Why?

Because the teen understood the circuits, chip-sets and wires at a fundamental level from the atoms up in a manner that the vast majority of coders and hackers like herself were never trained to do. With limited money, not much space and having a rocky-road relationship with her mother in the years after Jack had left them because of that misunderstanding... Well, she just didn't have the opportunities or chance to go deep into the hardware part of the systems she used to hack and splice her way through to her goals and even working with Phoenix hadn't really changed that. Sure, she understood the principal concepts and she had increased her technical knowledge of the physical components, but the 3 years she spent in super-max jail in isolation cells hadn't helped to keep her edge anywhere what it should be today.

Pursing her lips in concentration, the 27 year old woman began to connect all the devices to the wired hub, then the scrambler and then the secret device with the antenna connecting to that little toy but not the hub itself to complete her private network. It was time to test her theory to confirm that she understood what the blasted little bugger at the other end had done to her team's gear. She booted all the devices, starting with her official laptop and phone, then the second CPU followed by the two burn phones. As the machines did their boot-up routines, her 'autonomous analytics' box perceived, scanned, and decoded the signals going through the wires and airwaves between the connected items. After that, the analysis & decryption software inside said box sent the report by airwaves, through the antenna, to the Internex where it would lodge in a phantom dead-drop bot until she recovered it for usage.

Picking up the cardboard box on the floor, she opened it and pulled out the cheap Best Buy family grade laptop she had Bozer buy for her an hour ago and booted it with just the firmware OS. The next ten minutes were spent waiting as the ordinary device loaded everything. She was humming a tune in her head, looking in the far away city lights through the window near the front door as she
patiently took the time to mentally organize her response if this proved to be what she thought it was. When the Microsoft Surface CPU made a cheesy 'ding' sound to warn it had finished its initialization, she configured the web browser and email account then went to the Dark Web, to a personal 'unlogged' site, to access her kit of hacking tools so she could download them and finish prepping the machine to her tastes.

After an entire hour of preparation, she could finally access the report the analytics box had prepared as it scanned her other gear. And – Hot Damn! – they were screwed so hard it wasn't funny! When she reported this tonight, Matty would want her head on a pike!

Western Africa; 06:48am

East America; 23:48pm

West America; 20:48pm

"That bad, eh?" asked a soft voice from afar, startling her out of her funk. Swiveling her head around in a panic at the surprising sounds, she finally found the source of her interruption. Aiming narrowed brown eyes full of fury at the smirking blond brat sitting in her blind angle on the thickly cushioned wingback chair near the room's bathroom door, she made a vaguely threatening obscene gesture at his grinning face.

Not impressed by her fiery temper he knew so well, MacGyver wore an even bigger smirk as he stood up to come near the table and look over the assembled devices, wires and paper printouts that were spitting out of the compact traveling laser printer stashed out of the way on one of the unused chairs. Standing well out of reach from his vengeful colleague lest she swat him a good one, the young man was looking around the setup with a frown, trying to comprehend the reality that his addled, recovering brain didn't want to engage with.

Riley was now the one with a wide appreciative smirk as her friend made a nice figure, clad as he was, only in his thin dark blue plaid lounge pants, shirtless, barefoot and all mussy-haired from sleep, his green eyes still glassy from the brain-searing migraine he had suffered. She made a show of ogling his chest as he stood there and it took him almost a whole minute to realize what was going on. Blushing and smirking at the same time, the young man flexed his arms comically to get his female friend a chance to laugh and de-stress from the coming teleconference with HQ later that evening.

Riley had a predatory grin as she bent down to pick up the piled up printouts. Straightening up again, she asked her friend "Are you recovered from your migraine? You seem better than earlier when we returned from the University Hospital. Maybe you could even help with my little problem, eh?" she asked while trying to discretely push a pile of sheets on the tabletop towards him.

Angus sat on one of the dingy unpadded chairs near the table, shrugging as he did. Laying his crossed arms on the tabletop, he answered "I woke up to use the toilet and realized that I didn't feel the whole world spinning around me, so I tried to eat a bit. I warmed up the beef soup in the microwave on my side of the moving partition and it stayed down easy enough, so I was wondering about eating the rest of my food when I remembered you had a problem on your hands. I came to see but you were deep in the reports so I just sat aside and kinda spaced-out in the chair by the bathroom until I heard your 'expressions' of dismay." Smirking brattily, he quipped "Do you know how cute you are, when you try to incinerate stuff with your eyes?"

The young woman snorted and shot back "Try keeping it cool when it's your ass on the line! I can feel my butt warming up just at the thought of the thrashing Matty's gonna give me for letting us all get hacked like we did. It's not like she can blame Jack or Wilt for this!"
Laughing out softly, Mac reached out to put a supportive hand on the girl's shoulder and give her a gentle squeeze. "Don't worry, Ri, Matty won't tan your butt; she'll tell Jack to do it. He's your 'daddy' isn't he, since he dated your mom way back when? Should be 'bout time he took his job seriously!" he finished as he quickly got off the chair, racing back to his side of the suite, slamming the sliding wall shut to protect himself.

Blinking in surprise, Riley had a two second lag to hear and understand the guy's joke at her expense before she jumped up in hot pursuit. "Get back here, Mac! I'll show you who YOUR daddy is! And it ain't bloody Jack 'I be macho-man' Dalton, I can promise you that!" Punching lightly the cheap plywood panel that refused to move, she grumped aloud some nasty stuff then turned around to concentrate again on her impending date with an irate boss. Hearing the blond buffoon clowning around on the other side of the wall wasn't helping her concentration but it did raise her spirits a bit because it meant that he really was feeling better. Now, if only she could find a way to spin this situation so that she walked out of it alive and healthy... With Matty-the-Hun, you rarely knew in advance how things would turn out, even though she had proven to be decent enough.

{ SQ } - { Friendly gathering } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 07:37am

East America; 00:37am (midnight)

West America; 21:37pm

Wilt Bozer came into the rooms by the side Jack and Riley used as he thought Mac was still asleep and he didn't want to wake him up rudely. Although he had given the other man plenty of hard wake-ups over the years as part of pranks, this time, with his friend's health not being at its best, it wouldn't be funny. Entering the shared room, he saw the mess of electronics, cables and reams of paper covered in Riley's untidy red & blue scribbles. The young woman herself was standing up sideways at the back of the room, leaning her hip against the small kitchenette counter as she sipped some cheap motel coffee while the microwave buzzed lazily as it warmed its contents.

The girl must have been far gone into her virtual world since she didn't react to Bozer coming into the room with his arms loaded in purchases, quite a few for her, in fact. Hackers have this habit of snacking on stuff to keep their hands and thoughts working in synch and Riley was no exception to this unwritten rule of the profession. Deciding to make some noise while he was out of the danger zone in case she reacted badly, Bozer dropped the bags on the end of Jack's bed carelessly so as to bring his friend out of her dreams. It worked as planned; blinking owlishly, Ri turned around towards the noise with a frown on her face and acerbic comment ready to zing out at need.

"Oh! Bose. Sorry for welcoming you back with that face." She opened with a smirk. "I thought you were Mac. The green-eyed wunderkind got out of bed feeling better and decided to spread the feeling to anybody in range. Made me want to punt him right back to La-La-Land."

Laughing in honest amusement, Wilt nodded vigorously as he separated the items into four neat piles to be recovered by their eventual owners. "Yup, that's my friend Mac! He such a sweet, caring dude! And then he opens his trap and you wanna sock him one!" Snickering through his task, the black male asked out for the gory details of her encounter with their sickened teammate.

Groaning in dismay, Riley shook her head. "Nothing worth repeating. I was just stressing out because of our call-in later and the big lug razzed me for it. I will, however, be getting back at him. I just wouldn't be a good caring friend if I didn't." she told with a playful smirk that promised retaliation.
Wilt was all for it; MacGyver was like his brother from different parents but the guy could use a little tough love from time to time. For his own good, of course. Nothing like a little 'natural consequences' to complete the sorely lacking education of a young man in this day and age! Eh eh eh!

As Riley took out the remains of her evening meal from the radioactive death-trap on the counter and Bozer was ordering the many different bills on which he had written the names of the people for whom the stuff was bought, the partition wall opened fully to let Angus walk through, fully dressed again with his hair less messy (nice try) and a more healthy complexion to his features. Smiling gamely at his two friends, the SIE (Survivational Improvisation Expert, ©Wilt Bozer 2016) walked into the shared space with more assurance and steadiness than earlier. Sitting on the bed next to Wilt, he began to collect and organize his part of the supplies.

Taking his receipts from his childhood friend, Mac was itemizing the collection of thingies he had asked for when the door clinked open to let in their team's oldest member. Wearing a large grin and plastic bag filled with extra goodies for the evening and road ahead tomorrow, the Delta Force soldier walked straight to the service counter where he began to put away breakfast food for their early rise and departure the next day. Jack had always had a weird instinct of when things on a mission were gonna start moving quickly and his gut feelings on this were simply not ignored. On just his gut feeling and opinion when he told them, all four adults would have their gear stowed and mobile before going under the sheets in foresight of a cold-start at dawn.

Riley was chewing through the remains of her chicken, salad, rice and potatoes plate with alacrity as Mac went to his side of the suite to fetch the solid part of his dinner so he could eat and dodge getting a resurgence of his migraine from malnourishment. The easy to reheat and consume flatbread pork souvlaki sandwiches with some fries and salad were exactly what he needed to fill both his growling stomach and the empty time before call-in to Phoenix HQ.

Everybody sat themselves on the same side of the table, side-by-side so they could see the monitor and be in the camera's field of scan as well. Matty had told them to all be in the picture when they called in, unless they were separated, in which case she expected them to have their own smartphone set to video conference so they could be visible as extra mortises in her own giant monitor. Also, she wanted to be able to convey non-audible, body language signs in case they knew they were being wiretapped or the room was bugged for sound. Her ideas were good so the team had developed a manner to do so without getting tangled up in protocols and regulations while in the field like tonight.

{ SQ } - { Things get worse for everybody } - { SQ }

Western Africa; 08:01am

East America; 01:01am

West America; 22:01pm

The beep from Riley's base-camp setup startled them as it was supposed to be them that called in, not the other way around. This was especially true since one of the jobs Jack had done while walking around was to use a public payphone to call-in at Phoenix to speak with Matty's secretary to give her the code-phrase to signify their comms were compromised and they would need to be careful during their vid-con later. Exchanging looks all around, they made food crumbs and empty containers disappear, as the young woman typed in the codes to decrypt then accept the incoming line.

The image of Mathilda Webber appeared but she wasn't in the usual command room at the Phoenix Foundation HQ. Instead, she seemed to be in the cylindrical, elongated space common to small jet
planes for chartered flights. The background noises still coming through the filtration software to clean out the ambiance for the conference quickly confirmed it, especially when the engines revved up to begin pushing the plane on the taxi-way towards the lift-off runway.

Gazing at the four teammates with her deep black eyes that had seen so much death, depravity and betrayals during her duties in the CIA's counter-espionage division, the short middle-aged woman gave all of them a glare that sent cold dread crawling down their backs.

She was nicknamed 'Matty-the-Hun' by a lot more people than just Jack Dalton. And if THOSE kinds of people thought fitting to call her like that, then they better listen 'or else' would happen to them.

"Alright, settle down kids! I'll make this easy to understand for everybody, even you Jack." She began with her common biting sarcasm towards her well known co-worker. "Our mission briefing has just taken a nosedive down the crapper and come out the pipe worse than raw tepid sewage. I was part of an emergency vid-con with several of the Directors in the Alphabet-Soup in the early evening. The so-called 'leaders' in Washington DC are all a-quiver with fear and panic at the idea that the US president could literally buy and sell – people – at his convenience without any bother for little things like, let's say, Human Law, Morality, Decency, Good Taste and such."

Taking a deep breath to steady herself while Agent Cage came into the picture from the Jet's rear cargo bay, Matty focused on the gist of her message. "Basically, this situation with Lucas Wolenczak has managed to do what the four previous years or debauchery, calumny and peddling the influence and authority of the Office of the US President to the Russians had not. The Democrats in the Capitol have acquired the smoking gun by which they can now lay official charges of 'felony', 'conspiracy' and 'active complicity' against D. to depose articles of impeachment against him and actually have enough Republicans to support the process actively until it succeeds. The Secretary of Justice has publicly separated himself and his entire department from the Trump Camp and already appointed a Federal Special Prosecutor to work on the case that is emerging. This could create an actual, genuine constitutional crisis in American society and cause the re-thinking of several hundred laws and customs that have accrued over the last two centuries of legislative activity."

Matty paused for a few seconds before continuing "What you need to understand is that the 'timing' of events is what makes it so critical and likely to go down the path of Capharnaum. Trump is the incumbent president; he was elected in 2016 and has won in November 2020 with, again, a very specifically geographically situated minority of the electorate. He got in by the way electoral college voices are counted, not the popular vote. HOWEVER, at this point of December, he is ONLY president-elect, he is not sworn in, that would normally happen in January. Therefore, even amongst the republican party's higher members, there is a thought current that says this is the ideal moment to kick him out, since it wouldn't be an actual 'sitting' president getting arrested by the FBI. Ergo, the reason all DC is twittering with both worry and excitement."

After giving a minute for the gravity of her words to sink in, Matty explained the impact on Phoenix and its ongoing missions. "Given that Trump will most certainly get destituted before he is sworn anew, the DXS (Department of External Services) is now on full lockdown in anticipation of social unrest and possibly the onset of civil war. By joint consensus with the directors of the agencies in charge of managing secret and compartmented intelligence, black ops and anti-terrorism efforts, the Secretary of the Department of Defense has invoked the activation of the 'Noah's Ark' protocol."

Matty's statement was welcome with utter silence like the mental nuclear explosion it was

"I remind you that several thousand Trump allies and observers have predicted all along that if the Big Man was ever toppled by judges or taken out of office by Congress, his base, the grassroots
followers in the hotbeds of white supremacy, right-wing ultra-nationalism and christian dominance would rise up and tear apart the entire system. More specifically, they would revolt and wage armed warfare against the hated 'modern leftist liberal values' and all government or cultural institutions that incarnate them. Alongside of this, the country would experience a flareup of separatist movements that seek to split apart the USA to make certain regions, mostly in southern and central states, independent from any control not their own. It is important to note clearly that practically ALL of these movements are motivated by racial and religious dogma as the foundation of their publicly declared 'patriotic' creed.

Agent Samantha Cage added spontaneously "Don't forget that with American culture the way it is, 'patriotism' rhymes with 'guns' and 'violent defense of...' All of these militias and sects fully endorse that method by pushing their members to have guns, bombs, armored trucks and bunkers. None of these groups, even the smallest, will let this situation with Trump getting investigated publicly then destituted and eventually jailed for crimes be resolved in DC, let alone by the courts."

Matty Webber picked up the line "And that is the cause of this problem. I sent out an order for all Phoenix personnel to activate their home security on its highest non-lethal settings and pack any supplies, tools and weaponry they can grab or buy before this hits the fan on Monday morning when people's minds will be back on business rather than the holidays. We got lucky that this broke on a Friday evening so late. At this time, almost nobody of importance will be available to make rash decisions or inflame the masses from a mediatic pulpit. Come Monday at 7:00am, that's gonna change in a bad way. We need all of you to be on war-footing and ready to sail through the storm that's brewing on the horizon."

A voice in the airplane public-address system called out "Director Webber, we have been cleared for take-off and our flight plan to Washington DC was approved with changes from the National Guard. That's a new development, Ma'am. The Guards have issued a general muster and are moving out of their barracks. They are assuming positions around the National Capital and initiating a defensive regulation of the airspace and boating on the Potomac river. The control tower has relayed that DC's police chief has just released a message through the public alert channel that they are putting in place the civil emergency barricades and uniformed officers to re-direct traffic away from the White House, Capitol, Pentagon and about two dozen federal government buildings. The FBI has released a communique by SSA Seely Booth whose head of the Bureau's task force of defensive policing actions around DC in case of insurgency. The FBI has gone to 'Red Alert' standing and is in the process of pooling its people with the Secret Service to insure the safety and serenity of personnel inside federal government buildings so they can process the investigations and legislative meetings without threats."

The pilot paused, the stress and anxiety audible in his voice even to those hearing through the remote linkup. The man wasn't finished with his report. "Madam Director, we have received answers to our flight plan requests from the USAF tower in charge DC's airspace. We have obtained clearance to travel into the National Capital but ONLY because you are DXS Director, and even then, just barely. The National Guard have decided to run interdiction maneuvers around the DC extended perimeter. They want to have us land the jet in Joint Base Anacostia – Bolling under F-15E fighter escort then you will travel through the town's outer districts to the Lake Barcroft facilities via a military motorcade which the Anacostia quarter-master will provide."

Mathilda looked perplexed for a second then asked aloud for the intercom to pick up "What do you mean, Bolling? That place stopped receiving fixed-wing traffic in the early 2000's!"

The pilot responded "It's by command of the DOD ma'am; it comes with the protocols that were activated earlier today. All military command officers and high-ranking agency executives are to be using the Bolling airfield until the National Guard, Secret Service and FBI all concur that the state of
civil unrest has abated sufficiently to return to normal functions. As of now, all decisions for the extended DC Metro zone are done by the Capital Alert Status Committee operating out of Bolling, therefore explaining why all the big wigs are supposed to transit by them now, in case they need to meet face-to-face or something like that.

Looking straight into the eyes of the agents assembled on her monitor, Webber answered tersely to the empty air around her so the cabin microphones could pick up her words. "I get the message, pilot. Get us up ASAP, the country's falling apart around us and we don't have time to waste!"

Crossing her arms over the top of the table before her, Matty spoke her orders. "You four will get your scrawny asses back to Los Angeles and bunker your houses down for a long winter storm. Pool everything at MacGyver's house and help him and Bozer barricade the place to hold out until you come back from several weeks of mission. The wolves are coming out of their dens, gathering in packs and the Hunt will start in earnest come Monday, maybe even sooner."

Passing a weary hand over her forehead, the black haired woman told them "As soon as all your lodgings and personal belongings are secured enough to survive the imminent societal clusterfuck, I want all four of you to take the same reinforced DXS jet you're already using. Head up north to Vancouver to track down our wayward genius in whatever hole he's dug himself. Your roles will be as bodyguards and survival insurance for him. I can foresee that the new DOJ special counsel will want to debrief him, possibly have him testify before Congress and the senate committees. He needs to stay alive and coherent to do that."

Matty and Samantha sat in the chairs in front of the monitor and tied her seat belt as the warning lights came on to warn them they were going to lift off in less than 60 seconds. After a five minute long pause while the plane shot off the runway, Matty continued issuing orders. "You will be going to Vancouver just the four of you. I need Cage as my own body guard and the rest of Phoenix is in the process of recalling all foreign territory operatives back into US lands so they can be brought home to solidify and defend DXS buildings while covering our critical assets. For the next week at least, that's the lay of the land."

The DXS director made a face before she finished the bad news on her end; "However, you won't be completely alone to protect Lucas Wolenczak. The NCIS is the only agency with manpower to spare for 'external' missions, so they are sending you 4 people to complete an 8 man team so the escort detail can cover all shifts around the clock. The NCIS manager for the Pacific Region has already transferred the files of her chosen agents to us and they will be waiting for you at HQ. You are to be concentrating on the protective aspects of the job while NCIS will focus on the testimony and deposition. It is possible that either the Secret Service or FBI will also send extra manpower to bolster and reinforce your position for a long term duration. At this point, nobody knows what's going to happen or how long it will take."

Western Africa; 08:29am

East America; 01:29am

West America; 22:29pm

Not getting any questions from anyone to date, Matty asked "Riley! I need to know just how your team's gear got hacked during the mission so we can avoid it happening again. Skip the technical crap and get to the nuts & bolts of it, we don't have the luxury of time anymore!"

Swallowing passed the lump in her throat, the younger woman tried to smile to hide her anxiety but it came out as a grimace of uncertainty that did nothing to settle the nerves of her director. The
explanation that came afterwards did not help calm her either.

"Well, you see, the good news is that I know who hacked us and how, and maybe even why." Riley started hesitantly. "I'm convinced that it happened yesterday in San Francisco when we tried to approach the Wolenbahn office & workshop that is inside the World Bank's Regional Management building. I think we got hit with some automated 'probe, identify & repel' firewalls from the Bank, but also we then got hit by 'ping, track & spoof' spyware from the WEI signal routers when I tried to do a cursory scan to see if I could get info on where the kid was. One thing I found was that WEI has the equivalent of a tel-co's city switchboard center, with enough power pumping through the antennas and wires to blast through anything trying to overpower their broadcasts. Fortunately, the Bank identified us as harmless and ignored us because I didn't scan them actively but the Wolenbahn, however, detected my scans and identified us as hostiles attempting to penetrate their firewalls. That was the moment we got well and truly 'spliced'."

Taking a sip of coffee to steel her nerves, the hacker composed in her head the short & sweet version to pass on to her boss without going geek on her. "Look, the nitty-gritty is this; once WEI's electronics warfare servers, and yes, I would bet my bag of tricks that it's how they're set up, once those machines identified us as enemies, they started pumping a 3-way attack at us. 1- they dumped several thousand virus, malware, junk email and SMS with hostile attachments to monopolize our in/out services. 2- they swept the airwaves to get our cellphone numbers and the mobile IP addresses of any laptops or tablets we had so they could backtrack our origin to hack our home-bases, which they did."

Matty raised a hand imperiously as she barked "Whoa, there girl! Are you telling me that the guy you were sent to find is the one who found you instead? And he knows where you work, and potentially where you live? How the bloody blue blazes did this happen?"

Wincing in misery, Riley replied as politely as she could. "Matty! You have to understand, when I say that office has the equivalent of a telephone company's municipal switching servers, I wasn't kidding or exaggerating! Trying to ping the place was like going against a Rogers Tel-co service hub in LA; the output pouring from the place is scary, even for me! The only other place I ever saw signal strength and multi-channel defenses like that were at the NSA when I hacked them four years ago. I have no idea what WEI is doing in there, but they have juice passing on both directions across several thousand channels like they're running a public smartphone & satellite communications subscription system the way Rogers or Bell do. In fact, that office is like a land-bound Aegis Destroyer, constantly and systematically pinging, tagging, identifying and back-tracking EVERYTHING that comes in its reach. And in the middle of San Fran's financial market, that's a fucking whole lot of crap!"

Bozer placed a hand on Riley's forearm in support, giving her a friendly squeeze to show he was with her. The woman roughly passed a hand through her hair, undoing the complicated style she usually wore. "Sorry about that. It's just... This guy... He's a kid, okay... He's a decade younger than me and he's light years ahead in everything he touches or thinks about! I mean, he's like a 'MacGyver' of material sciences, mathematics, medicine and cybernetics all rolled into another damned blond brat. He's gonna see what we're doing from a thousand miles away and laugh at it right to our faces! Look, Boss, I'm good; you know I am! But not against this kid. He's better, and at a lot more stuff, and unlike a lot of weirdos and psychos we usually go against, he's also incredibly rich, has a couple thousand highly technically competent employees that work for him and about a hundred buildings he can hide stuff and people in. I'm just clueless as to what me, alone, can do against all of Wolenbahn or Wise Apothecary to solve this mess."

Matty's features softened greatly as she understood all too well the feeling Riley was drowning in right now. She felt this way practically every day she worked at the CIA and it had gotten worse
when she ascended to lead the Department of External Services. The types of planet-endangering crises she was aware of but couldn't do anything about because of damned budgetary limits or lacking manpower with the required brain-capacity... Yeah, she understood what kind of breakdown Ri was having and she didn't blame her any. The summary files she had read on Wolenczak before making the call showed her clearly just what kind of 'major-league heavy-weight' she was telling her team to rub against. She had expected something like this reaction and wasn't angry or disappointed by it. God knew, she'd panicked the first time she saw the kid genius's actual 'classified' files from the Secret Service.

Speaking in a gentler tone than her normally nasal, aggressive voice, Mathilda told her employee, and friend as well: "Calm yourself Riley, and drink your coffee while it's hot. It'll settle your nerves. Take your time, girl. We'll all be there when your ready."

The team's professional hacker nodded thankfully and took the following minutes to stabilize her thoughts, trying to recover from the mini break-down she had. She was stressed, tired, frustrated at her own limitations and then getting 'Noah's Ark' dumped on her when she wasn't in her own town was pretty much too-freaking-much for her to handle alone anymore. Thankfully, she realized she wasn't alone anymore; Jack was back in her life, as were her mother and biological father. Bozer and Mac weren't bad friends either, and certainly useful in a crunch. Now, all she had to do was finish this briefing and sleep all through the nigh time plane ride to Los Angeles.

"Sorry, about that, Matty." Riley apologized tiredly as she rubbed both hands over her face in a gesture that spoke volumes about her frustrations. "Is I told you, there are 3 things that went wrong when we got hacked. 1- we got a multi-channel service denial attack. 2- we got our mobile comms ID'd and tracked back home. Now we get to number 3. That's what MacGyver saw when he thought I had hacked his phone and told it to synch with his laptop back at home. The little bastard Wolenczak has managed to take the original service packs from the factories that make the phones, tablets and laptops and open the source code. He then placed 'spywares' and remote controlled 'bot modules' in the packs before recompiling and setting them in outgoing servers connected to his WiFi, Blue Tooth, cell signal, wired signals and the firewalls in his defensive arrays."

Riley sounded defeated as she confirmed their fears. "What it means is that the moment you get into contact with a Wolenbahn controlled network, you get a 'spoofed' signal telling you that your device's firmware, the OS, has new emergency updates to fix critical flaws and so the 'service pack' will come in and install itself silently, without ever asking for permission because the original manufacturer's priority override codes are in it. Once in place, the 'spliced' pack will take over all of your comms management and Personal Identification Numbers, turning the machine into an autonomous spy. At that point, the pirated modules will activate your synchronization function, if you set it up already, to link with your other devices and spread itself to the rest of your devices. If you have a VPN encryption or any ciphering keys or log-in management apps, they will get logged, tagged and copied then sent back to the WEI central for analysis and exploitation so they can sweep, scan and copy all of your encrypted data traffic without you ever finding out you've been wiretapped."

Ri added blithely in a dead voice "The very worse thing though, is that the firmware module Wolenczak downloads into your devices actually employs your own auto-update, synch and automated virus-scan apps to camouflage its activity as being normally scheduled benign activity. The pirated OS packs even have the gall to overwrite your Internex or telephony access provider's logs to hide all the bandwidth used so you don't have a ginormous bill because of the spliced mods. In fact, the damned spyware even has the ability to remotely access and control each and every function to such a level that it would be more accurate to describe it as being a complete replacement OS than just a limited service-pack with a few 'extras' in it."
MacGyver asked the poignant question that was on everybody's mind at this point: "How the Hell did this little guy do this at his age? And how do we fix it?"

Taking a deep breath, the young woman answered blithely "I can only guess at 'HOW' he did it. But for the removal, you need to process the devices in a clean room barricaded inside layered Faraday cages and use solid-state archives supplied by the manufacturer directly. It has to be a 'scrapping' low-level format with a clean install of the genuine legitimate Operating System, without any add-on's. Any attempt to use the web by airwaves or landlines will see a small virus integrated to the BIOS, clock and GPS chip of the infected device hijack your request for an emergency reboot with full wipe of the machine and direct the signal to a dummy switching server instead of your official ISP or manufacturer. Basically, every time you ask the device for something, it will do it, but through a pirate version of the apps and will send a record of it back to its 'master' hub somewhere in the depths of the Dark Web, on an 'un-logged' site that we won't be able to access, identify or even just track."

Their female techie finished despondently "Honestly people, against this kind of tech capacity, if you really want to take on Lucas Wolenczak as an enemy, you might as well ask Jack to take over as the mission leader and do this completely off-grid. It's pretty much the only way to accomplish something against WEI without being spotted and betrayed by your own tech from a thousand miles before you reach the teenaged blond runt's position. And then you have to deal with the poisons, acids and explosives he'll have made to welcome you with."

Bozer chimed in before the director could, saying glibly "Well, then! It's a good thing we ain't going in there as his enemies, isn't it?"

Samantha Gage replied to his comment "Yeah, for him it's good. But does he know we don't want to be his enemies, and will he believe us when we tell him?"

Matty Webber's cellphone rang with a ringtone she had never programmed in it. Looking at the device as if it had betrayed her Bloodline, she read the small TXT message that came in. It said simply:

"You would be surprised, dear Ms Webber, what I can believe, when truthful proof is presented to me honestly and openly. L.W., PhD, MD, DP."

Raising her eyes to her team on the monitor, she deadpanned "Well, people, we're fucked not just a small bit. Our dear Doctor Wolenczak is quite obviously on the line with us. He has just 'texted' me a little love note. He's aware of our attempts to contacts him and willing to receive our proposal. I'll write something formal and send it to all of you in CC when I reply to him. Until then, you have your marching orders under 'Noah's Ark' protocol and they haven't changed."

She closed the line, leaving quite perplexed teammates to figure out what came next.

In the next chapter We will see further preparations across the USA for the coming upheavals of society and government. The Agencies and Military branches roll out their men while trying to protect their families and homes from the unrest that is already starting to hit some cities in the Deep South.

Nathan Bridger and the SeaQuest rendez-vous to begin service as they wait to be called for their true mission when the UEO Fleet Assets Command calls on them. The ship gets an emergency influx of extra crew and supplemental equipments that had not been expected, bringing her to a capable warfare standing despite all the negative budgetary previsions since her entry into drydock 2 years
Lucas Wolenczak will re-order his many plans for his necessary medical treatments for his legs and continuing health problems, taking new 'allied' external players and their resources into account.

President Trump, from the Oval Office inside a bunkered White House, will publicly light a Fire that will never be extinguished. His speech will empower his grassroots supporters, pushing them into starting a Christian Holy War for carrying out a New Inquisition against all Heathens and Non-Believers that will scourge the Land of the Free. That appeal to the rawest tenets of American Exceptionalism, to the basest arguments of white supremacy and the worst prejudices of religious domination in the Name of God will work to erase any and all Freedom for generations and cover more countries too, if the worshipers can manage it.
Burn Baby, Burn, Burn, Burn!

The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } - { WARNING } - { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

For this chapter, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours as well as Western Africa.

This is a very long chapter, over 56,000 words or around 85 pages; have a coffee and snacks on hand while reading if you do it in one sitting.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO’?

SIXTH CHAPTER; Burn Baby, Burn, Burn, Burn!

Escapism; when reality ain't your thing

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)
Lucas slurped his coffee with great relish as he considered the nice oily black little nugget of nastiness he had just dropped in poor Director Webber's diminutive lap. Wearing a shit-eating smirk of epic proportions, the teen justified himself by thinking that she had her 'baby Einstein' for a year now so she should be used to having bratty blond geniuses in her work environment.

Snort!

Having 'The Royal Challenge' as ringtone that would specify it was Lucas calling would prove interesting for the woman. He was important in the director's job now, it behooved him to make himself available and easy to reach. The boy wondered if the woman, in her forties, would recognize the musical theme from the old 1980's cartoon series He-Man. Having the herald trumpets and hunting horns sounding our of her pocket every now and then like when King Randor arrived in the throne room to hold court should liven up her days.

Eh eh eh! the boy laughed softly at the words appearing in the lenses of his neural meta-glasses. He lazily read over the small message he had texted to her phone after hacking it and programming the new tone. "You would be surprised, dear Ms Webber, what I can believe, when truthful proof is presented to me honestly and openly. L. , PhD, MD, DP."

"And SMACK in the kisser, girl! That'll teach you to make plans for me without consulting me first!"

Was this brattiness? Yuuppp, you betcha! But it was FUN. And for a young guy on the run from an entire country full of blood thirsty clerics, mercenaries and rioting civilians with torches and nooses, it was a well deserved moment of humor that helped to break his stress levels and go back to a normal heart rate.

Let's just say that the CNN news updates all evening long hadn't been conducive to making him want to turn off the lights and go to bed, all alone in a dark room. And he had no gun with him. Capsules of acid, poison and incendiaries aplenty, but no actual weapon that could do real damage against an armored, experienced foe.

Damn.

Now he would have to find a way to hold on until the conjoined DXS/NCIS protection team arrived at his hotel in late Sunday afternoon. Come to think of it, he might as well call the reception and make arrangements with the manager to reserve the suites on either side of his to be fully shielded during his stay here. Given the spacious well appointed settings and impeccable service, he doubted the agencies would care to downgrade to a cheap motel or vacation camp lodge somewhere in the woods. Especially in light of his legs and general health, neither of which were secrets. He needed to be near enough to a hospital to get his yearly checkup and surgeries done before the end of January or risk developing suppuration's along the gouges dug into his long bones to inlay the reinforcing rods and organic glue.

Chucking another mouthful of coffee, the blue-eyed wunderkind set his neural interface to dig deeper on the Department of External Services and what they did for a living. After that, he would dig up
the personnel files and biographies of each person in the team they were sending. He already had the
file for the much vaunted 'Matty-the-Hun Webber' that he filched from the CIA's tertiary backup line
archival server located at Laughlin AFB in Del Rio, deep in the south Texas forests. Since the
machine was a slow-poke piece of obsolete DEC-chip 21064 boards running on a VAX Alpha AXP
RISC architecture with OpenVMS operating system and apps, getting in had been relatively simple.

No pile of discontinued, unsupported, scrap built in 1993 would stop a hacker of Lucas's caliber
when he put an effort into his work!

Besides, by the server's logbooks, there hadn't been physical maintenance in the room where the
machine was located in three years. That was weird. Lucas hacked through the Laughlin Air Force
Base records and land usage blueprints until he found the server's location. As he saw the building,
he understood why it had gone without being physically touched and cleaned in three years. It was in
the basement of an old private mental health hospital specialized in PTSD and addictions that had
been closed following a suspicious fire in the boiler rooms but never renovated nor sold off. The
building was condemned and shuttered with large thick plywood placards and wire worksite fences
but there was no signs of human activity around the terrain. No work crews, no guards, nothing.
There wasn't even any electronic surveillance around the charred husk or outside. The old edifice
had been flatly left to rot, without any care for its contents.

Smiling widely at the stupidity of humans, even in the self-styled 'intelligence' community, the
adolescent whelmed the tremendous capacities of his neural interface to find what he needed through
the dark, foggy, back channels of the Dark Web. He wanted a contractor, preferably a team, capable
of infiltrating the AFB without causing alarms or calamities, reach the outlying civilian sector, enter
the derelict hospital and find the still operating server. At that point, the hireling's job would be to
secure the incoming connection, splice in a set of new wires and adapters then plug in the CPU that
Lucas will have supplied to create a reliable, secured connection to his Virtual-Private-Network on
the neural frequencies of his futuristic network so he could work the CIA’s massive trove of decades
of secrets and leverage at a respectable speed.

Hacking Matty Webber's file had taken almost an hour. That was far too long in real time but with
the neural interface as the work tool, it was utterly unacceptable performance. The archival server
was far too old, and programmed far too inefficiently, for the situation to be tolerated any longer.
Since forgoing the source of deliciously naughty secrets was not going to happen in this lifetime,
Lucas was reduced to doing what he seemed to spend his life doing: call in for service from a
contractor.

"Blast it all!" The teenager grumped playfully as he sent messages to a dozen 'reliable' technical
mercenaries that he had found or been referred over the years. Some of them had even done small
jobs for him in the recent past when his overbooked schedule got in the way of, well, other work. "If
it ain't the toilet backing up, or the gas lines leaking, it's the bloody server across the country going
haywire. Blergh! Why is it always – ME – who ends up cleaning other people's messes anyways?"

Shaking his head in mock despair, the boy got back to splicing the aforementioned archival vault
with great care in case of booby traps. This was CIA territory, even if just virtually, and they sure
liked their traps, them guys in Langley. Lucas sipped his coffee slowly as he browsed the module
architecture and apps directory, wondering if there were some traps that he could find to retro-
engineer for his own use. That would make this whole slow-motion fishing expedition worth it. And
fun. Disarming traps or blowing them up was always good fun and calmed his nerves when he had
an attack of insomnia.

Before he lost himself in the meanders of the CIA's forgotten septic tank, the adolescent needed to set
up a few things for the next day and beyond. Just in case things went even more pear-shaped than
they had already done. It wasn't pessimism but good old fashion understanding of human nature that
made him prepare more contingencies and equipment hoards in secret locations. What was the point of learning about psychology and psychiatry if he didn't use it to save his life?

Allowing himself an hour for some housekeeping chores with his extra plans, the young man accessed his neural VPN to find his semi-trucks roving across North America. He found two near his present position; one had arrived in Edmonds north of Seattle, tasked with examining and opening up the unnamed Manor that Lucas knew he owned there, while the other was in Canada, in eastern British Columbia, in the small town of Castlegar, already heading towards him as he had ordered yesterday evening. That truck would arrive at about the same time as the protection details from the DXS and NCIS who would leave from Los Angeles tomorrow morning.

Not having any other resources nearby to assist his mobility or survival, the teen turned towards the commercial options he could exercise; buying vehicles, filling them with equipment and food then stashing them in decrepit hangars that he would buy under new anonymous shell companies that would suddenly appear in the Canadian Registry of Corporations by his good services. What's the point of being such a darned fine hacker if he didn't use it once in a while? Eh eh eh! Lucas browsed through used vehicle dealers in Vancouver, looking specifically for one that also had a mechanic's garage integrated to the business so he could have his purchases inspected and customized as he needed. Finding a seller proved easy as he found a place called 'Northshore Auto Mall' not far from the Daleminton Hotel, just a short car ride along Marine Drive.

The shop called Tired Re-Works Inc specialized in obtaining used working trucks from diverse types of companies, from simple restaurant delivery vans to telecom tool trucks with crane arms or nacelles. The selection offered by the shop was sturdier, more rugged and far less conspicuous than other choices from dealers of new cars. Looking over the selection of what he himself could drive in a crunch despite his bad legs and limited driving experience, the boy concentrated on Chevrolet or Ford full-size vans with double rear doors, sliding side-door and heavy climate control unit on the roof.

There were a pair of those that were exactly what he needed and available inside 24 hours. Both had been part of a company that did residential construction contracts all over the city. While the tools had been taken out and sold separately much earlier in the year, the vans still had all their internal setup of workbenches, drawers, closets and, more importantly for Lucas, the special devices were left in to sweeten the sale. Each vehicle had a small office fridge (4'cu) with a makeshift folding sink and a folding two-hob propane burning camping stove. The water and gas canisters were bolted to the outside of the van on the rooftop and the owner would need to climb up the ladder set on the rear door to reach and service them. A wastewater plastic drum was set directly inside the van's compartment under the sink's position, and it served as trashcan too, that was taken out and emptied out manually. In a situation of last resort, that drum could be used as a dry toilet too, as the contractors used to do when they worked in the more rural areas outside of town where the clients hadn't rented portable worksite toilet cabins.

Lucas thought about what he might need to change on these trucks to make them practical for escaping into the less populated zones while keeping himself and his escorts alive and sheltered, if not comfortable. These weren't RV's by any stretch of the imagination but if they could adapt a bit, then the vehicles would be quite serviceable for his cause. Looking over the entire lot of equipment that had been procured from the bankrupt contractors, one van caught his eye as it had everything the other three did but also much more. As it had served to install utilities and security systems, not just ordinary construction, it had a roof mounted crane/ladder telescopic arm ended in a cherry-picker nacelle capable of hoisting 2,000 pounds of weight. The nacelle had electrical wiring with a connections box, three network cables (coaxial, RJ45 & fiber-optics) with an 8 port hub for each type, compressed air pipe with multi-plug to connect pneumatic tools, a pressurized water hose with multi-plug to feed tools or hydraulic systems or even test plumbing to find leaks. This particular
Chevy Van was about a yard longer than the others, with a snowplow blade and winch already installed on the front bumper, and it had all the extra diesel generator, air compressor, water cistern and propane cylinder for a gas welder and a small counter-top smelting crucible used to work certain plumbing or cable parts.

Making an impulsive decision, Lucas logged onto the dealer website's e-commerce section to create a customer dossier linked to a corporate account belonging to a fake shell company he created two years ago. The company would buy the four vans and have them cleaned, detailed, supplied and delivered to a warehouse or hangar that he would need to find. The solution was simple; near the place where Welch Street passed under the elevated Lionsgate Bridge Road, was the CN (Canadian National Rail Co.) triage yards that passed a lot of cargo every week. Because of this, several companies had located near the zone and one was of particular interest for dry-storing 4 heavy vehicles for a prolonged duration. It was a U-Haul facility that rented storage units, including some that were big enough to serve as garages for RV's or even semi-trucks. Logging into the U-Haul remote service section, Lucas found and inspected the specific facility he wanted to use then paid for 2 double capacity, dry garages with the same & shell company as the one to buy the four vans. The U-Haul franchise would inspect and lock the the two side-by-side units then send two sets of keys by private courier, one for Lucas himself and another to the vehicle dealership that would deliver the trucks directly into the parking hangars inside of 24 hours.

With his emergency preparations for the immediate future finished, the teen logged on to the website of the limousine company he had used when arriving two days ago and reserved a similar short limousine with driver for tomorrow morning at 09:00am to go do some shopping and tourism. What was the point of coming to Vancouver in the height of winter holiday season if he stayed cooped up in the hotel room all the time? It was bad enough that he would be stuck in a hospital for two weeks soon, no reason to deprive himself when he was still mobile and not threatened directly just yet.

When his purchases and reservations were done, he turned back to the CIA's backup server in Texas, thinking that a few hours of straight programming & hacking would help him relax so he could sleep better. Setting a clock to ring when it was 03:00am at the latest, he pooled all of his concentration unto his hacking and lost himself in his virtual realm.

Midnight crisis

(Law & Order – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 09:15am

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 02:15am

Western America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 23:15pm

Condo #15-D; with terrace

1101 Admiral's Walk, Buffalo, New York, USA

Cynthia Holtzenstein was in a mood to throw stuff over the terrace banister, regardless of damages, injuries or liabilities she might incur. She had just managed, at 01:49am in the friggin' morning to reach her condo after getting jammed at the office for hours, then stalled in interminable traffic. She arrived only to find that the bloody elevator in the tower was out of order for hours because some dumb, uneducated, gray-headed geriatric lout had drunk too much at his office party only to puke it all over the cabin two hours earlier. The emergency call to the cleaning crew had gone well; they had come to do the job in record time, given it had been midnight, in traffic, in a light snowfall. But the chemicals they used to clean the carpet and felt side panels were toxic so the cabin was parked in the
upper level of the tower for another two hours to let the fumes vent out by the shaft's rooftop maintenance hatch.

Cynthia had to climb up all 15 floors in her damned four-inch dress heels. At her age and lack of genuine exercise ("boinking customers don't count" her doctor said) it meant one minute per floor to ascend to her rightful place atop the building filled with nicely appointed apartments. She had walked into the suite dead on arrival and completely not interested in anything but some hot solid food, a glass of red wine and a foot massage. Luckily, she was about to get at least two of her desires satisfied; she had some leftovers from two days ago in the oven warming up and the bottle in her hands would not resist her efforts at pulling the cork out much longer.

As it was, she managed to pop the recalcitrant device out of the way of her delicious red nectar without accidentally spilling any on her clothes when the doorbell affixed directly to the frame of her main entry sounded loudly. Lips firmly pursed in disapproval at having to delay her much needed libations, the middle aged woman marched on slippered feet to look at the security monitor, thinking idly about who or what could be calling upon her home at this unholy hour. At least, it couldn't be Lawrence or Lucas as both were out of the country and a dozen hours away by chartered jet.

Activating the safety TV built into the wall next to the door, she instantly thanked her lucky stars she had left the wine bottle on the dining room table, otherwise, she would have been horribly splashed when she dropped it in fright at the sight.

An FBI – SWAT team on her doorstep. In flak vests, riot shields and assault rifles.

Taking a deep breath, Cynthia let her more criminally minded professional instincts to the fore of her thoughts and saw that she was not in danger physically. The leader of the FBI task force was in the front, right before her door, wearing only a regular winter jacket over his smaller flak vest. He didn't have a weapon in hand nor a shield so he obviously didn't think he would be welcomed by a gun-toting madwoman. The briefcase dangling from his left hand however had her gut feeling tell her she would need to remember all she had ever learned about federal search & seizure warrants in a lawyer's place of dwelling. Thankfully, her home office was a dedicated room with a locked reinforced door; they could not simply go in unless they had the appropriate court orders.

Unfortunately, she could bet they did. She really didn't think they would bother to come intimidate her at 02:30am in a bloomin' snow storm if they were expecting to return empty handed.

Swallowing her anxiety and pride, she buzzed the intercom and spoke firmly "I can see your team crowding before my door. Please do be careful with the antiques while you visit my apartment. Many are bought at European auction houses and more valuable than the building your offices are located in. It would be a shame if I had to invoice the FBI for compensations due to vandalism and careless manipulations of personal belongings non-critical to your investigation. Please file in one at a time slowly and be careful about those bulky, unwieldy riot shields."

Pushing the button to unlock the door, she turned back to her dining room and waiting wine. She just had this gut feeling she would need it.

"Madam Cynthia Lydia Wise Holtzenstein, ex-Wolenczak, esquire, attorney at law?" asked the man in the shorter lighter body armor the moment he joined her in her dining area. "My name is Sylvester Jacob Ashford, I serve as senior state's attorney of NYS for the Buffalo metropolitan area. I have here a warrant for your arrest and detention on multiple counts of child neglect, abuse, assault & battery, criminal negligence, criminally depraved disregard for the life, health and welfare of a child in your care, by-passing a court injunction that led to a child being subjected to unlawful authority, selling the custody of a child which counts as 'human trafficking' and being an active accomplice or mastermind in the torture, degradation and attempted murder of a child. Please turn around and place
your hands on your head while you are searched bodily."

Making the fakest smile she had, Cynthia replied "I am unarmed. Could I please put on my boots and coat before you complete the arrest? It will be easier for all of us that way."

The attorney looked at her blandly, nodding to the heavily armed female agent at his right. The rest of the 15 minute process, 20 minutes down the stairs to the outside parking lot and the following hour long drive to FBI regional office would all be done in deathly silence. Nobody in uniform wanted to sully themselves by having a conversation with this sub-human beast and she didn't speak to them since she considered them socially inferior to her imagined station in life.

It wasn't nice knowing you

(JAG – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 09:30am
Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 02:30am
Western America; Friday 18th of December, 2020; 23:30pm
World Power Plant Project; General Direction Edifice (topside)

South Africa, western coast near Cape Town

Lawrence Albert Wise Wolenczak was in a nasty, piss-poor disposition as he looked in the mirrored side panel of the elevator cabin, using the time of the ride up to adjust his neck tie and pocket square so that he looked impeccable for the coming meeting. He had received the message at 08:00am that the board of administrators for the World Power Geothermal Subducted Plant Project (WPP) wanted an emergency conference with him. In person. All the representatives were physically present in the building to attend in person, not the usual proxies, delegates or occasional remote attendance via video conferencing.

In person!

And they had commanded that he be present in person too.

Four different ambassador-level governmental officials with diplomatic credentials and immunity come to invade HIS building, HIS work site and use HIS facilities, buffet, washroom and favorite conference room as if THEY were in charge of WPP!

The fact that in reality the governments of the 3 confederations, the UEO and 9 major commercial partners were the actual financial backers behind the project and therefore the genuine bosses never entered his mind at any costs. The fact that in legality their mandataries truly were in charge of everything therefore could issue any orders they wanted, including shutting down work or closing the site completely, was not something that Lawrence would ever admit to his own bloated fragile ego. Besides, he had so many schemes, frauds, bribes, thefts, embezzlements and outright lies to foreign companies and dignitaries about his position carrying diplomatic privileges and immunity (that he didn't really have) that he simply could not afford to think about what the results would be if there were questions, let alone investigations into his tenure as Head of Project and General Manager. He might as well commit suicide before the arrest was made; it would be less painful, and certainly less publicly degrading to his weak mind than being dragged off in handcuffs like a vulgar, low-borne, back-alley ruffian.

The felonious engineer passed weary dull brown eyes over the reflection of his hairstyle whilst
studiously avoiding to look too closely at his face or eyes as they were well repaired but still showed damage a year after the surgeries were finished, then glared malevolently at the elevator control panel. The fact that the cabin was painfully slow wasn't any news to him; he had ordered the janitors to make certain the cabin slowed down discreetly the higher it went in the edifice. The purpose was to forcibly make visitors feel just how unwanted their presence was in HIS domain and just how low, menial and troublesome their petitions were compared to his own importance and busy schedule. This little trick was supposed to make people aware that dealing with him in person was not practical, certainly uncomfortable, and business would go a lot faster and easier for them if they bothered his minions in the lower levels of the chain-of-command, not him. It worked well enough on corporate reps and low-tier bureaucrats full of their own importance (that's rich coming from him!) so why the fucking Hell's bells could it not work on damned vote-whores and their lickspittles?

And why in tarnation did the damned janitors disable his priority card-key that makes the services work better and faster for him or his high-level guests that he actually did invite?

The cabin finally dinged it had arrived on the 25th storey and the doors opened.

Right into a group of black uniformed UEO military police wearing body armor, utility belts and pulse rifles. In the back of the soldiers stood the face of the one person on the entire planet Earth that Lawrence did not want to see inside his territory, let alone inside the management building. It was bad enough the rabid bitch had to visit the undersea construction site or the underground utilities tunnels that were built to pass the pipes, wires and service trams from the shoreline to the subsurface area, but there were no reasons he would accept to let this garbage dump spawn into his compound's command center, even on a good day!

The person that invaded so rudely his hallowed grounds was none other than General 3-stars Sarah MacKenzie, formerly from the US Marine Corp, then the US Navy's Judge Advocate General for twenty-three years, and now she served honorably as the UEO military police's Regional Marshall of the African subcontinent since the founding of the inter-confederation alliance. She was as hard-assed now as she had been in the corp and as an officer of the military courts-martial. And she never, ever had bought the lies, frauds and self-aggrandizing delusions that Lawrence peddled to everybody he came into contact with. It was as if the woman was born with a lie detector in her ears. Every piece of propaganda, advertisement or testimonials of good friends in Washington DC, each and every intervention he tried to make her believe his spiel so she could leave him alone, none of it worked!

Her presence here with soldiers and weapons could only mean one thing.

The career military woman gazed impassively upon her skittish quarry, from the feet up, observing the high quality steel-blue bespoke 3-piece suit he had chosen for the decoy meeting that had served to lure him out of the underwater bunker that was the WPP's power generation complex. It was a good thing he had so stupidly believed that the reports on TV were so damning that the government leaders would move their own persons to come to his table. The man was gullible and self-absorbed to a level that was hard to believe for one so inured to frauds, hypocrisies and lying with every breath worse than a priest trying to get elected to a political office in a banana republic.

MacKenzie sighed in relief as her men brusquely turned Lawrence around to put cuffs on his wrists and search him for weapons or contraband items. They had just avoided a bloody catastrophe by managing to arrest the treasonous bastard on the surface portion of the WPP compound. The thought of going down some 10,000 feet under the waves in flimsy Zundweil class DSV sub-ferries had given her shivers of dread but that hadn't even been the principal danger in the mission. Following young Lucas Wolenczak's revelations through the media, a far more stringent analysis of the WPP construction plans than any other done before was accomplished by the UEO's corps of military
engineering at record speeds. It had made the gear-heads in New Cape Quest open their eyes to see things that were never supposed to be present in the installations, while at the same time several modules or structural machineries that were planned had never been built since their allotted space was used for other purposes, if said space was even constructed.

In the wake of these discoveries, the MP detachment in charge of watching over the UEO's third biggest budgetary expenditure after the Active Fleet Assets and the network of Atmospheric Recycling Towers had been mobilized and given their marching orders. With dire warnings of severely questionable activities related to workers with mafia connections, hidden rooms, unexplained machines and secret docking bays where unidentified submarines were doing cargo swaps off the books still ringing in her ears, General MacKenzie had opted for the more roundabout method to capture the criminal.

Incite him out of his fortified, booby trapped lair with his favorite bait: power & influence.

The UEO – MP were just lucky that the slovenly, self-imbued bastard had fallen for their trick without batting an eye. If he had decided to bunker down in the underwater enclave that housed the geothermal wells and the generator assemblies, only a handful of ships on Earth would have been equipped to pull him out by force. And only two were in service right now; the Russian ocean floor drill & dredge vessel Manaya Illiyushka (civilian) and the English subduction/construction barge Beaumaris (military) but neither were armed to punch through fortifications like WPP. The SeaQuest was in drydock in NCQ and the chinese would never admit to having a ship capable of doing this unless their secret projects in the South China Sea Islands were finished and ready to defend their contents.

That was among the first questions she would ask him when they sat him in an interrogation room back in Cape Town. Just WHAT and WHO was doing stuff inside that damned underwater village of his and how much was he responsible for all these crimes happening. Then, they would start asking him about the estimated 637,000,000 credits that had disappeared from the WPP's bank accounts during the 22 years he had been in charge of the project.

Lawrence Wolenczak wasn't getting out of her custody in this lifetime, not if Sarah MacKenzie had anything to do about it.

Besieged Nation

(US National Anthem)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 10:01am
Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 03:01am
Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 00:01am (midnight)
Lake Barcroft; underground emergency 'convention hall'

Washington DC, Virginia, USA

The Director of the Presidential Secret Service (USSS) Roland Toopin stood unsteadily at the secondary podium, looking over the truly impressive assemblage of august members of the USA’s most elite, powerful and determinant military, intelligence and police groups. The 'convention hall' kept getting fuller as minutes ticked by on the old analog clock set into the dashboard of the podium, besides the equally old landline wired-handset telephone and intercom system with large backlit plastic buttons that hearkened back to the first years of the Cold War.
Roland had honestly hoped that this deplorable period of planetary and American history could be put to rest but every damned year that passed seemed determined to bring those problems back to life. Or at least, the stupid old fucktards that went under the appellations neo-con and baby boomer seemed to insist on doing one last turn around the killing fields before they were too old, sick and senile to have any chance at finally winning the wars that they had lost, or at least not really won.

Toopin could have lived with the decrepit old gray-heads' turpid dreams of spraying one last cumshot in the faces of their equally old, decrepit and senile adversaries IF the fools hadn't been so dead-set on doing their warmongering by proxy of today's generation of barely adult youths. The small group of worn out, obsolete religious wastrels wanted to send to their deaths the grand-children of the entire country just to be able to say one last time "We are the White, the Christian, the Great America!" no matter how many hundred thousand souls they sacrificed for their god-powered imperial utopia.

Toopin redirected his thoughts and attention to the central podium where the top-man of the day was setting up to deliver the USA Constitutional Crisis Briefing #001 of all the country's history. Despite all the most positive thinking and optimism in the world, this could only get so much damned worse before it got any better at all.

\{ SQ \} - \{ Hate thy neighborly heathens \} - \{ SQ \}

The US Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Laurent Yves stood at the main podium on the middle of the raised scene, readying the solid copies of the notes he needed to run the massive conference through the semblance of a productive work session. That was going to be hard as Hell cuz they didn't have much to work with right now, only the bare essentials. It was 9 hours now since they had declared the activation of the 'Noah's Ark' protocols and it would take almost another 15 hours before the municipal police forces, national guard units, army regular troops and army reserves were all commissioned, billeted, equipped, shipped out and finally located at their tactical posts to watch the critical, or weak, infrastructures from rioters and looters.

As he finalized ordering his papers and thoughts, the comms console operator began accepting the contact lines from the several dozen remote participants and setting the mortises on four lines at the bottom of the gigantic main monitor that hung on the back wall over the raised scene. Each of the attendees would have a similar setup on the personal monitors at their desks, be it here in the hall or wherever they might be during their emergency transports to reach the Lake Barcroft facilities.

Once all of the expected remote links were confirmed active and live, several national guard infantrymen acting as ushers began using tablets to tally attendance then send the compiled identities of the members present back to the central comms operator who would then flash a set of colored lights above the cinematic screen to warn the people as to the status of the meeting. The moment the lights changed from red to yellow, the mass of humanity present sat down, closed briefcases or duffel bags, set their coffees at hand, dropped food wrappers in the bins next to their desks and tried to become as silent as possible.

When the signals turned green, each person present took out their smart phone and placed it on the induction plate that served to recharge and wirelessly connect such devices to the building servers. Then, each highly ranked, severely classified visitor used a secret proprietary app created by In-Q-Tel to log in the bunker's military VPN thus confirming the authenticity of their presence while downloading the meeting's notes and crib sheets for later study. The other benefit was that now they would all be connected to the selective/sectorial intervention dispatching console so they could get the emergency messages and orders in real time instead of delayed by several hours. With the events happening to society outside the walls, they could not afford to have slow reflexes nor sit idle until marching orders managed to make their way to the hands that needed them.
At exactly 03:20am Eastern-America time, the blast doors to the convention hall were closed and the first meeting to 'save our country and people' began in earnest.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, I am Laurent Yves, Director of the DIA, the US Defense Intelligence Agency. We are the organization in charge of gathering, collating and analyzing the raw data and work reports or every agency in the American Intelligence Apparatus so that we can then prepare the morning briefing of the seated president. Our product composes 50% of all intel, spying and counter-terrorism reports or suggestions that are handed to the president and the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff every morning at 08:00am, 365 days per annum since our foundation."

Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, director Yves pursued "We are here in the depth of darkest night to plan for the storm that is coming to our shores. A few days ago, our sitting president, who is the incumbent that won the November 2020 elections, wrote out a pair of presidential decrees that are on the farthest side of illegality, illegitimacy and immorality that any president in the 200 year history of America has ever signed and sealed."

"The first document called 'POTUS Decree 2020-12-11 / 01A – Christian biblical authority of parents under God' is an ill-thought, ill-conceived, utterly unconstitutional attempt to use the Oval Office to create a state religion and force down the throats of every child in our land the legally-binding obligation to attend mass, get blessings and sacraments. It subordinates their welfare, health and even their lives to the commands of their father, grandfather or the priest chosen by the paternal side of the family as 'spiritual guardian'. This document destroys several decades of child protection laws and rules, as well as puts in question the very existence of family courts & DCFS and reneges the Supreme Court or Congress established fundamental human rights of anybody under age 21 and reclassifies them as 'children' without any sorts of discernment or regards for their actual age or mental faculties. Under this decree, a 20 year old would get treated the same as a 1 month old, without any sorts of appeals or recourse for anybody to intervene on behalf of the 'child' aggrieved."

"The second document called 'POTUS Decree 2020-12-11 / 02A – Authority of military Christian juvenile reformation under God' is an even worse piece of cold shit that seeks to not only undo, but actually reverse, 200 years of military laws, rules and customs in our nation. This decree seeks to anoint specific chosen officers, soldiers, permanent civilian employees of the DoD and even temporary external contractors as being 'Faithful Crusading Paladins' for the military and 'Worshipful Custodians of Faith' for the civilians. These persons would then be given a series of truly depraved, debauched powers over those 'children' brought to their military installations or ship at sea for the purpose of beating and raping religious education and spiritual belief into them, all the while extorting free – enslaved – labor out of them in exchange for the most inhumane living conditions. These conditions and treatments at the hands of 'Experienced Soldiers of Holy Jesus, our God' are supposedly to redirect these kids from the path of 'dispiritment' and 'criminality'. Since the only kids targeted by the decree are specifically high functioning, highly educated prodigies that attend university classes well before the normal ages for such, the only conclusion is that this is a dirty trick to grab slaves to bolster the army cheaply whilst allowing the soldiers to beat or rape them as a non-monetary reward for those who are loyal to the cult and creed of President Trump and his church minions."

"It is important for you all to understand this: these decrees remove children and young adults who have not reached age 21 from the rolls of known humanity and retrogrades them back amongst the beasts. It is even written clearly both decrees that 'Children will have no rights but those that are granted in public display by their father, grandfather or priest chosen by the paternal side of their ancestry.' It further states that this is the Will of God and all children of America are 'compelled by Holy Almighty into Righteous Moral Obedience' to these decrees without any appeals, court session or even having the chance to explain that they are neither christian nor religious at all. In fact, one of the points declared and repeatedly strained in both documents is that 'Atheism is a tool of Satan's Fell
Plan and must be fought bodily with the Rod of Disciplines just as it is fought spiritually with the Christian Bible of Jesus our Lord God the Redemptor."

"At this point, and following the reading of these two decrees, we at DIA have advised the Secretaries of the US Federal departments, the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff, and the leaders of the Security and Intelligence Agencies that manage our country, that we are now in a state of 'constitutional crisis' and that the Enemy we face today is organized criminalized religion. Specifically, it is fanatical worshipers and those who whore themselves to cults and ecclesiastes to obtain money, power, guns, drugs, slaves and cheap deviant sex from the sect victims. Also, most urgently at this time are the cult gurus that get elected to government offices or integrate our military and bureaucracy with a determined plan to try, from inside the ranks, to disassemble and destroy our civil state and modern rights by subordinating our laws to their cult texts."

"Furthermore, it is now the determination of this agency, in a report that I have read, validated and signed in the name of the DIA, that President-elect Donald J. Trump is in fact a religious fanatic, a cult guru and an active preacher of white supremacy, hate and discrimination. Due to his clear public subversion of the powers of the Commander-in-Chief of our armies and the Legislative/Veto Authority as the topmost elected leader in Congress; we at the IDA have determined that he is an internal domestic terrorist. This brings us to the logical conclusion of this analytical process to also declare that he is an immediate threat that must be removed from office and incarcerated for trial at the earliest possible opportunity."

The entire assembly hall fell deathly silent.

For four years now, since his election in 2016, there had been rumors of corruption, collusion with foreign powers and willing subordination of US policies to the whims of external entities in exchange of favors, access and financial rewards for members of the extended Trump entourage and companies. The mainstream media led by CNN, the Washington Post and New York Times had given themselves to great daily ejaculations of vitriol and doom-sayings against the entire Trump administration and style of governance. They were being warred against by far-right outlets like Fox and Breitbart who had declared themselves the flag-bearers of Trumpism, white christian dominance of society and the resurgence of American Exceptionalism as in the 1950's, the 'Iconic' reference epoch to which the aging 'baby boomers' wanted to return the entire Earth so they could relive their youth and earn their warrior glories again.

Up to date, a lot of backroom meetings and behind-the-curtains deals had been uncovered then exposed in public, but still nothing truly illegal, just on the very limit between unethical and forbidden. The only people sent to jail or fired from their jobs had been caught when lying to the FBI or the judges during evidenciary hearings, or worse, they had tried to destroy evidence or subvert the process of Justice in some way that involved bribes, threats and wielding the authority of their post to try and quash the investigations. Basically, if the people involved had just been honest and forthright from the start, the Mueller investigations would have lasted a few months then shut down by lack of anything criminal or forbidden to chew on. Instead, the principals in the case all mindlessly did the very worst things they could do for their defense or that of their groups, thus keeping Special Prosecutor Mueller well occupied to this day, and he wasn't even finished.

But now, after four years, they had the PROOF.

The other worst idiocy from the Trumpism Movement, was that the proof they got didn't even come from the Russia collusion probes or fraudulent money movements by Trump companies and so on. No, what they got was very different, indeed.
They had gotten clear and obvious proof of criminal behavior, illegality and usage of his function and position for his own personal religious creed and profit. Said profit, in this case, wasn't monetary but political and societal, in the form of getting millions of voters who are religious fanatics and the ecclesiastics that lead them to support his agenda of extremism, racism and American Exceptionalism to justify warring and enslaving other countries.

And the geriatric blond imbecile had given them that proof in public, all by himself.

All the military chiefs, the directors of the agencies, the highest elected officials, and the highest career bureaucrats in DC, were now in the deepest most toxic cesspit that anybody had ever dug in American political history. And the only way to stop it had the potential to cause the second civil war that was so dearly anticipated and desired by the fringe militia fanatics.

Director Yves stood silently for five minutes, allowing his words to register fully with the gathered attendees before continuing with the suite of events that needs, must, happen for them to still have some sort of a country come Monday morning.

"I apologize for being the bearer of such bad news. I apologize for being the man who has to say aloud that the president is defunct, a criminal, and a religion-driven traitor to every oath he took. However, now, I must also stand at the fore, torch in hand, to say aloud 'this is the way' and hope that you will all follow the road back unto the path of lawfulness and morality that we should never have left."

Seeing several nod their head or settle down with writing implements to take down the list of actions to come, the director of the DIA took a deep breath before speaking aloud the words that would mark the course of US history and society for the worse.

"I hereby declare that the sitting President has been sufficiently tied to acts of immorality, illegitimacy and illegality to force his suspension from his office, position, function and authority until such time as Congress has debated and voted upon 'articles of Impeachment'. Furthermore, I find that several of the acts the sitting President is accused of do, in material fact, constitute outright criminal behavior that is already codified as such by our written laws, and I must thusly emit the warrants to order the arrest, and detention without time limits, of Mister D. by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and his trial by the Supreme Court of America."

After a pregnant pause of roughly twenty seconds, there was a mounting noise of movement as people understood that the ball was in their court and they needed to start doing their jobs according to the laws and statutes of the organizations and postings they were part of. Phones were activated, emails were written, TXT messages sent out and formal legal documents were chosen, filled out, printed and signed as fast as the tired, worn out humans could work through the tsunami of crap that was starting to sweep over them.

As the warrants were written, signed and sent out, the leaders of the FBI and Department of Justice got on their phones to start a separate conference with the Chief Justice of SCOTUS to warn him that as of now, the president was under criminal investigation, and also, potentially, the vice-president as well as several high functionaries who were all in the 'line of succession' in case the Big Man was ever incapacitated or dismissed forcibly.

As things went, everybody in the massive hall already knew there would be precious little sleep in sight, nor any mental rest to be had any time soon.

We stand in service to our countrymen

(The Strength of a Thousand Men – Two Steps From Hell)
Three massive army trucks, olive drab and black with just the basic road lights lit on them, arrived in a hurry with no indications of why visible anywhere in the area they parked in. If a citizen were to look at the area what they would see would comprise a huge set of highway overpasses, with a good sized creek filled with slow icy water along a set of doubled rail tracks, both passing right under the massive concrete arches and pilings that held the roads aloft, thus confirming they deserved their appellation as 'highways'. The national guard trucks had arrived on the north side of the creek, by rolling on the highways and then going off road southwards a couple seconds through marshy woods till they reached the railways that was their set mustering point.

The standard military 2½ ton all-purpose trucks disgorged a full dozen infantrymen dressed in white camouflage BDU’s (battle dress uniform) covered by kevlar & plastic flak jackets and winter trench coats. Each soldier carried an old but reliable M16 assault rifle with very modern omni-scope, laser range-finder, clip-on bayonet and under-slung grenade launcher. Additionally, each carried an old Beretta 9mm sidearm, a K-Bar fighting knife, a hatchet, a folding camp shovel and enough spare munitions to hold in place for an hour against enemy fire. Each soldier was also loaded like a mule, carrying on their backs a large heavy frame pack containing the necessities for camping in rough winter conditions and an equally large duffel bag that held extra dry clothing, more food rations, an extra med-kit and a tool-kit to fix their weapons or other gear.

As the national guardsmen spread out just besides the rear gates of their transports, the officers came out of the drive cabs, marching at double time until the 6 superiors were all gathered in front of the 36 privates to tell them what the new reality was, as of tonight. FYI; it wan't no pick-nick no more.

"All right, ladies!" The top-most officer shouted with the usual humor of a drill sergeant addressing a group of young inexperienced men that were still clueless about what real warfare was. They were about to find out. "Listen here people, or whatever you think you are tonight! This here junction has five different highways merging into a knot of loops, on-ramps and overpasses, a double rail track and a cute little creek. We need to secure this here hot-spot and pray everything stays clean and nice until noon when the rest of our outfit comes to join us at making snow forts! You maggots have the next hour to take the nice clean laminated maps and plans you were given when you loaded up and make it happen! I want me six rows of six tents with three bonfires at the ends on both sides of the rows! Line up north to south, between the rails and the highway! The seniors will have point for now, then we'll make our tents in two rows of three on either side of the main formation with yet another bonfire on each end. Now start unpacking the pallets from the trucks! Them plastic racks are gonna serve to keep you guys off the cold snowy ground so you don't get sick! It's important to set your pallets flat and straight so you can mount your tents and sleeping bags on 'em the right way!"

A few hand gestures later and the soldiers, most of them part-timers, volunteers or retirees from active service due to injuries, all saluted the officers and got down to the brass tacks of setting a partial camp that would hold for about a week until the rest of their gear and men arrived. They were expected to have a total of six transport trucks, three heavy 40 foot trailers filled with long-term camp building tools and materials, a militarized backhoe, and a semi-truck hauling a 'Force Provider' mobile folding infirmary module. The municipal power company was sending them a tool truck with telescopic nacelle/crane and chests of tools and parts so they could connect to the power & comms
lines at the top of the nearby poles instead of burning diesel fuel in a field generator. That was good as they had the bad surprise to find that their camp power source had broken a set of crankshaft bearings during a test three weeks ago and wasn't finished fixing. No sense of urgency back then meant no money for the Guard and therefore a lot backlogged jobs because they weren't seen or felt as vital.

People sure thought them vital now, hence the Hydro truck being loaned out for a week at no cost but the gas to make it move. The guard unit had a few men who knew their ways around phone poles and high voltage wires, they'd do the work easy enough, so long as they could reach the proper cables and had the specialty tools in hand. With the backhoe and tool truck, they would.

Looking at the Beaverdam Creek's slow, icy flows through the copse of trees and bushes, the corporal made a face as a shiver of dread passed down his spine. They didn't have an amphibious truck and all the boats were being deployed from central locations, right from the hangars they were parked or repaired at. The reasoning was that at this time of the year, there was no tourist traffic on the river, only police crafts. As such, it would be a lot faster to equip the boats fully then send them on their ways via the rivers rather than mount them on trailers, drag them out to some place where the shoreline tipped downwards into a beach flat enough to serve as a water ramp and dump the boats there. In the case of a police search & rescue, they had only a handful of little patrol boats so road travel was the most logical system to get there quick, but the national guard had enough hangars and watercraft to cover most of the Potomac River, Washington Channel and Anacostia River with all their tributaries without too much trouble.

So the corporal was stuck watching the ice patches floating down the creek towards the Anacostia, hoping no redneck idjit tried his luck in a little dinghy of sorts to deliver explosives, poison, guns or lunatic fringe-nuts to this seemingly uninteresting crossing point. An uninteresting crossing of five highways, a railway ferrying passengers and cargo daily and a water stream that fed the Anacostia, all right on the doorstep of the National Capital of the USA. The spot looked like any old forlorn patch of urban greenery that wan't cemented over cuz it was sloped, rocky, in the stream's floodplain and nobody wanted to live in kissing distance of a train line either. Not to mention the constant drone of the five major highways that carried trucks of goods, buses of tourists, car-loads of lobbyists and some such all day and night year round. Even as the soldiers worked diligently, the corporal could hear and see several cars speeding along on their way to who-knew-what at bloody 04:24am.

One of the junior lieutenants approached, asking the grizzled old veteran of four tours in the middle-east "See anything, sarge? I don't think anybody would want to risk the stream this time of year. At least, not anybody with any common sense. Some fanatics, I guess, could try it. I bet they freeze their balls off before they reach us, though. The river ain't no place for a boat ride in December."

Turning to the younger officer, the older one answered "I hope you're right, man. I sure hope so. But with what happened in the White House this week, you know as well as I do that the crazies are gonna come out of the woodworks pretty damned soon. The brass think we have till Monday morning news briefs, but I think it's more till after Sunday mass, when the people in the pews gonna get sermoned into a frenzy, that's when we'll see the first bozos come at us. I wish I was wrong, but the shrapnel in my left leg says to watch our hides come midnight."

Nodding at his colleague's brand of wisdom, he was about to ask about what kind of duration he thought the outpost would see when they heard a 'clacking' noise resound across the camp's frigid air and screams of panic follow immediately as the men all dove for cover, the officers on point kneeling so they could raise their rifles to find the threat. Two more gunshots later, with another soldier down to bullet wounds, and the camp defenders had found their assailant. Perched on the Anacostia Fairway's south-bound bridge's arch that spanned over the railways and stream was a beat-up old
Ford pickup with a one man camper cab on its back. The truck was stopped in the service lane close to the cement retaining wall with some unknown bastard laying face-down on top of the camper section, a bolt action rifle with telescope sighted on them. It was only the fact the man seemed rather old, frozen stiff and not particularly agile that had left their team with two injured rather than three dead from the three shots he had sent their way to date.

As a fourth shot rang out, one of the younger soldiers gauged the range and let loose with a short five-shell salvo from his M16. The muzzle flashed in the dark depths of pre-dawn twilight, the report of the shots echoing eerily against the noises of the cars on the roads and the wind sushing through the trees that lined the rails and stream. The guardsman's aim was good; he had targeted just a few inches beneath the edge of the camper cab's roof, thus insuring that when his bullets passed through the flimsy metal they would impact the attacker lying prone on top. The old bearded crone shrieked something harsh when he felt the shells punch through him and the repeated hits actually imbalanced him, making him roll over to his right, and right off the top of his camper, falling down with bone jarring force onto the roadway behind the truck.

From the angle and points of impact, the corporal took a wild guess that the shells hit the old guy in the upper torso, tearing through his clavicles, throat and neck bad enough to either maim or kill on the spot. With harsh gestures and shouted commands, he got a team of six and a driver into a 'deuce' to roll around camp and up to the overpass deck to secure the crime scene so they could find out just who the fuck this dumb cuckoo was that shot their boys. Plus, he had to see to the injured and report back to home base that yes, the shit has indeed been introduced to the ventilation ducts and everyone got their share already.

They had been in the field for barely 30 minutes and the world was already burning. Damn, what a bloody Christmas holiday this was gonna be!

After ten tense minutes of stressful waiting, the corporal's radio beeped, signaling that his men on the elevated roadway wanted to speak with him. Tapping the button to activate the line, he said "This is Chetzy, what did you find up there?"

The response was blood chilling: "The reason this country won't heal in our lifetimes. Get up here on the double, boss! You'll want to see this yourself for when you call the brass back at the base. I'm sending the driver back down to get you. Over!"

Turning to his junior officer on the left, the corporal growled "Get the wounded positioned for quick evac and use one of our two other trucks to get them to the closest hospital you can find on the damned map! If we wait for civilian ambulances to arrive, we could lose them. Make certain that each injured has his own escort to keep his personal stuff and service gear packed tight; there's people prowling the hospitals that steal from the unconscious when they don't have surveillance on them. I'm going up there to see what's got our good private's shorts in a twist."

Marching away from the knot of junior officers, the corporal trotted to separate himself from the gathering around the injured and jumped into the drive cab of the truck as soon as it passed by, slowing down just enough to do a U-turn and speed back up to the road bridge and the waiting team. The moment the officer got off the vehicle, he was waved over at the front of the pickup to see something in the cab. As he walked around the battered old thing, the soldier could see it was a Ford 1998 worksite pickup with a foreman's extended crew cab to seat 5 people and an extra long camper that jutted out of the tailgate by about a yard an a half. The entire thing smelt of animal manure and fresh tree sap with a layer of dead bugs all over the front and sides that told the veteran the driver had spent prolonged time in the outlying rural areas near dairy farms, and that meant this shooter had gone far from home to commit his acts. That and he never cleaned his truck since bugs stopped flying around five good weeks ago.
"You gotta see this, boss!" brusquely said the soldier by the open driver's side door at the front. "Gird your guts, though. You won't wanna eat anything for a while after it."

Coming in sight of the side windows, the corporal could see what his subordinate meant. There were two very young children lying down on the rear banquette, the little girl of about 8 years holding onto the small boy of maybe 4 or 5 years. Both were dead, with bloody froth coming out of their mouths and the stench of vomit and urine permeating the cab. On the dirty tattered rubber mat next to the bench was a plastic bottle of orange juice, lying in a yellow puddle streaked with green lines, with many small holes corroded through the container like it had melted. The little boy held a worn old bible to his small chest and a home crafted set of christian beads made of some sort of animal bones had been wrapped around the hands of the little girl to make certain she didn't let go of her sibling in the afterlife. Both children showed purple and blackish bruising around the heads and faces, wrists and forearms too. The corporal knew instinctively that if their thin autumn clothes were pulled out of the way, the rest of their poor little bodies would be the same.

"We opened as much of the windows as we could reach to air out the truck, sir, without actually touching the evidence itself. But you'll need to get inside the camper to see the rest." the soldier spoke in hoarse tones, holding his military composure only by the necessities of surviving the event.

Walking back to the rear of the derelict truck, the corporal breathed in as much fresh air as he could while standing on a damned highway bridge dead-center in the capital city of the country. It wasn't going all that well for him right now, if you were wondering. Arriving slowly at the rear door of the camping cab, he merely saluted the three soldiers milling around the corpse of the dead shooter and ignored the dead body for now. He knew it wasn't professional, that protocol was he should get on his knees on the pavement to eyeball the sucker himself, but the contents of the drive cab had told him already this wasn't some professional team of hit-men. The body would only speak to the coroner now, not to a jar-head. Stepping around the body and getting a hold of the handles besides the open door, he hauled himself up into the camper compartment and saw immediately what his team leader had meant.

Besides the truly dingy living conditions, it was the bed area overhanging above the driving cab that attracted attention. The thin bug-eaten curtain that closed it off for privacy was a political flag that was based on the Dixie Flag with the stars replaced by white crucifixes. An image of a coiled yellow rattlesnake with open mouth and extended fangs was in the lower center while a black crosshairs with text wrapped around the rim occupied the upper center. In each side of the Dixie X were a black outline drawing of an M16 stylized as having a christian bible for magazine and a crucifix for bayonet. The text hand written with a yellow sharpie around the targeting cross in the upper middle of the flag read "Christian Bible Law! White Power Rule! Don't Tread On Me! Minutemen Of The Southern Revival Crusade."
Understanding a bit more what kind of delusional stupidity he was facing, the corporal pulled away the flag/curtain to look around the camper's bunk. Or should he say the gun storage attic? The old crone must have slept on the drive cab's banquette or on the camper's floor because even a field mouse would have trouble squeezing into the crammed space. There were about three old and battered hunting rifles, four revolvers, two semi-automatic pistols, a partially disassembled pump-action shotgun with a B-drum still attached to the receiver, a broken bump-stock for an assault rifle that he found jammed way in the back behind everything else and enough cardboard boxes of diverse munitions types to open a damned gun shop out of the pickup's back door.

Somebody knocked on the outer door, attracting his attention. Turning that way, he saw the face of a man he didn't know wearing the blue colors of a municipal police officer gesturing for him to come out and away from the truck. Complying with the man's request as he didn't think they had anything else to fear from this dead lunatic's lair on wheels, he climbed out of the miserable hellhole and walked towards the patrol car that was stopped about thirty feet behind the parked pickup with its red and blue strobe lights flashing to warn drivers away from the scene. His female partner was placing road flares to warn passing drivers to steer clear of the zone then came to stand by the man when she was done.

"Officers," the corporal began politely as this man and his female partner in front of him were not his enemies in the situation. "Could you give us a helping hand? Two of my guys were wounded by this deranged son of a bitch and they're on the way to a hospital already. There's two dead little kiddies in the front, in case you haven't been told." The corporal was valiantly trying to hold in his bile and thanked the gods of petrol fueled vehicles for the harsh offensive odor of burning gasoline as it washed the rancid smells of unwashed dwelling and human offal from his nose and throat.

Seeing his state, the female cop on the passenger side of the squad car reached inside to pull out a plastic bottle of water and threw it at the senior soldier. "Here, rinse your mouth out and spit it over in the drain grate so you don't contaminate the scene. It'll help wash the taste and smell out of your mouth and sinuses and let the bile settle back in your gut. Rinse twice, then drink and swallow on the third go. Trust me, man, it'll help a lot." The woman looked at him with nothing but sympathy clearly written on her features so he followed the advice. And damn, but it felt good! Feeling a bit more settled he looked at the two cops and asked again if they could help.

"Sorry, but no, we can't help much anymore. If he were alive we'd help shoot the fucker, or if the kids were alive we'd take them off your hands until DCFS came to get them, but now... All that's left is to wait for the mortuary van and the forensics truck to come process the scene. At least you don't have to be present for it, we'll go fetch you in the camp down by the rails when we need your testimony." Answered the male policeman in as soothing a tone as he could muster given the situation and the 230 pounds of angry US Marine he was talking with.

"Well, we can tell you who him and the babies were." came back the woman. "He was until a few years ago a goat farmer in Virginia, about five hours' drive from here but he lost it all in a fire in February of this year. The insurance company refused to pay out the indemnities because he caused the blaze during a roaring drunken bender where he shot up his entire house, his farm tractor and killed his two dogs when they tried to stop him from aiming at his grand-kids. That's the two little tikes in the cabin up front. Without the money to rebuild and facing criminal charges for public drunkenness, shooting wildly while drunk, animal cruelty, criminal negligence that started several fires and aiming weapons at people including the cops, firefighters and rescue techs, well, he wasn't looking at staying free for much longer. During the prelim, it was found out the bastard was some sort of backyard preacher who liked to hold book burnings to cleanse the filth out of the village where his farm was located. He was known in the little township for his virulent rants about jews and blacks stealing land from hard-working white folks like him and his kids. He also preached 'Rod Sacrament'; that's a ritual during which the priest (him) would whip the followers children with a
switch or a dowel rod all over their completely nude bodies in front of the entire sect to show how much of God's Power he wielded. He's been accused of assault, injury and obscenely exposing a nude child in public on several occasions because of that, but the charges always disappear from the docket somehow."

The male cop snorted in contempt before he took over. "AFIS says he was supposed to be arrested and held for trial about six months ago but he was warned to leave town by one of the village cops who was friends with the old crone since high school. Their sons were accomplices in a moonshine and gun-running operation that landed the dead bastard's boy and daughter-in-law in prison three years ago. That's why he had the kids with him; he was the only living relative they had. DCFS tried several times to pull them out of the household because of the man's heinous preaching and abusing them but they were always sent back because of his friends and cultists amongst the local population. It looks like there's a lot of the village cops and clerks that are sympathetic to the pseudo-priest, if not actual members of his sect. You can't botch a police investigation repeatedly like this so many times over so long without having a vested interest in it failing or stopping."

The female cop walked to the front of the car to lean her left hip against the front of the hood. "Well, now his instability has caught up to them and this is the result." She said in sad words. "If this bastard's anti-everything rhetoric had been looked at more seriously, we could have avoided this. Besides the fact he was criminalized, an outlaw and mentally unstable most of his life, the brief we got from our station is that this guy had been harping about 'End Times Prophecy' and 'Coming Storm' that the faithful had to face with guns and prayers for several decades. From my read on the situation, this is a demented old crone at the end of his life that didn't want to go to jail for his crimes, so he was looking to commit suicide by cop and found you guys first instead of us."

The corporal wasn't so sure. With all the crap coming out of the White House and the orders to go to high alert on all national guard units across the country, he just couldn't accept that it was dumb bad luck that so happened to have the same religious delirium as the main threat they were preparing to face in the coming days. He explained to the police officers his doubts and the male patrolman, older and with the department longer than the woman, responded with a clear argument that didn't leave much place for skepticism.

"I'm sorry to say this to you, but the children have died over six hours ago from drinking poisoned orange juice. The fact that the poison managed to melt through the plastic bottle and eat at the rubber floor mat means that it has been lying there for several hours already. This is confirmed by the fact that there's a puddle of body fluids and vomit on the bench and near it that is almost dried up already. All this together means that the old preacher finished his escalation into insanity and killed the kids in the rural area out of town before midnight then came towards the center of the District to find himself a 'Glorious Death' to be remembered as a warrior of his creed and faith."

The corporal yanked off his helmet and passed a rough hand over his buzzcut hair, hoping beyond all hope that the cops were right. Deep down in his gut though, he knew differently. This geriatric son of a bitch might have been simmering in his rage and depravity for decades already but it was this weekend that he decided to act out his 'final solution', not another time. And the veteran soldier just could not believe that it was a simple coincidence; his gut said otherwise. There were no accidents or coincidence in warfare, just events for which you didn't have the human intel to explain them yet.

Humans don't need brains!

(Rada - Two Steps From Hell)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 13:14pm
The elderly black woman looked at her reflection in the washroom mirror, making certain that her hair net was in place, the short necklace of pearls well hung about her neck and her wedding ring, gold with three diamonds, was clean and shining. Her poor late Jeremy had worked so hard back then to get this for her. Fifteen years on and she still missed him so. After drying her hands and splashing some alcohol based antiseptic on them, the nurse adjusted her blue scrubs and name tag one last time then walked out to face the day, sitting at the reception desk for the hospital's neurology department.

She had that job for over thirty years this week and enjoyed it much more than any she had before. The people she met or just saw passing by the doors every day was the real reason she had endured in the hard work environment for so many years. Her colleagues were nice enough, the hardships came from seeing so much pain and suffering every day. The worse cases were those when a person she knew finally lost their faculties and memories, becoming a different person that didn't remember the people they had known, or themselves anymore.

Mental illness was such a calamity. It didn't respect kindness, usefulness or heroism anymore than crass, criminality or cowardice; no one was safe before it's destructive path through american society.

Sitting herself at the desk behind the tall security glass panel, Bernice Agatha Coulson, Lady Bee as the staffers called her amicably, took up her mug of coffee and muffin to eat her small breakfast as she accessed her internal MUSC email account to see what happened while she was off. It was a personal routine she had established back when the only mail coming in were paper envelopes and the occasional fax in the large telex machine with the ream of paper rolling out of it. Things sure had changed in thirty years at this desk. With her shift starting officially at 07:00am, Bernice had all the time she needed to eat her homemade oatmeal, nuts and raisin muffin while drinking through the thermal mug of espresso she had brought from home. The hospital cafeteria made good food but it was so expensive if you ate there every day that the elder lady preferred cooking her own treats at her small apartment. It helped to keep her hands active and flexible despite the arthritis that was slowly setting in, and it was much easier on her budget.

Settling into her swivel chair, the 64 year old nurse was surprised to hear the large automated doors that gave onto Rutledge Street open to let in a group of people. This was unusual for the department as neurology didn't receive ambulances or emergencies directly; they booked appointments weeks in advance for grave operations or else the doctors went to the other MUSC buildings in the quad for consultations. Why were these people coming here at this time of day, on a Saturday morning to boot? Looking at the young woman that she was due to replace at 07:00am, Bernice asked her "Aisha, dear, did we get any paperwork for an early intake during the night? I don't have anything in my emails."

The young nurse apprentice, a black skinned girl in her early twenties that was actually doing her
nursing school internship at MUSC to finalize her diploma, frowned as she checked again her own messages and the pile of papers on the small table between the two desks. "No, ma'am Bee, there ain't no sheet about a patient coming in for intake today. We have a couple of them regulars for the ongoing treatments and Mr Dumont is coming in this afternoon for his MRI about his brain tumor, but nothing else that I can see."

Taking the minute before the group reached the reception & registration area proper, Bernice followed her instincts hard earned from raising five kids and some twenty grand-kids over the last fifty years of life. Her nose was smelling trouble, so she discreetly pushed the little red button under the lip of her desk that would signal the security station to watch over the lobby area for the next ten minutes or so to see what happened. If the roving guard was on his morning rounds already, he might even show up in person while his partner stayed in the booth to watch over the screens and phones.

The two nurses watched with apprehension the very odd group composed mostly of elderly white folks, with just one lonely little black boy of about 9 or 10 years that seemed to be helping an even older man stay upright as he walked with two heavy ornate metal canes. In total, the group held 14 persons and that was a lot to come in on such a cold, lonely Saturday morning when no stores were opened and even the breakfast restaurants had barely warmed up the grills and started the coffee pots. The two para-medical staffers had a bad feeling about his.

Finally, the 6 white men, 7 white women and lonely, clearly frightened little black boy, all approached the reception desk with the oldest, least mobile man in the middle of the formation. Once he was about five feet in front of the glass paneled counter, he straightened up as much as his bad back and shaky legs allowed and took a large, battered and dog-eared book out from inside his winter jacket. Holding aloft over his head the Book of the Christian Faith and Creed, he began his sermon unto Them hat followed the Creed and Message of the Christian God of the Bible.

"Hear ye, hear ye, and hear ye this, ye heathens of little faith! That means you, niggess bitches! The Hour of Judgment, it be upon you's all!" he screamed in a powerful if croaking voice. Pointing towards the upper floors of the hospital with his Book, he exclaimed "Heresy! Sin! Depravity! Necromancy! I tell ye, heathens! Unto you's souls be the Damnations of the One God, our Lord the Redempotor in His Divine Almight!" Now fully in the throes of religious frenzy, the worshipers were answering the calls and jeers of their leader in time to his exclamations and pauses, just like in a mass. "I cast upon you's all the Eye of the Lord, for He SEES the sins and crimes against the very Nature he hath created for us to bask upon and feed upon in our time of needs! You scurrilous peons of Satan's Plan! How in Jesus our God's Name do you justify the debased voodoo you commit in them here torture rooms and foul alchemy workshops of the accursed?"

His small flock of congregants called out in hard, unforgiving tones "Humans don't need brains! Humans don't need science! Humans only need God and His Holy Word! Humanity only needs the Christian Bible as it was written in the Time of the Romans! Hallelujah and Amen! Humanity don't need no stinking lies from Satan's Pits! Humanity don't need doctors when God's Will can cure all! We need Faith! We need Creed! We need the Disciplines of the Rod of God's Chosen on our backs to Guide us into the Light of Salvation! We don't want no stinking lies from science and doctors! Leave our souls alone! T'is the One God we worship and obey! By His Will alone be we healthy or die! Amen!"

Raising an imperious hand in the air as he clutched his leather bound Book to his chest, the geriatric preacher exclaimed aloud, shrieking harshly at the top of his lungs: "Burn it ALL! Burn it ALL in the Name of Jesus our Christ, the Lord Redempotor! Bring forth the Purifying Light of the Fires of Heaven's Wrath upon them heathen dogs and niggers! Make it burn, now and forever! Amen!"
As he closed his heinous sermon, the group of elderly worshipers opened their thick long winter jackets to reveal assault rifles, pistols and pipe bombs while the geriatric priest opened the backpack worn by the small black boy that served as his mobility assistance to pull out a small 1 quart canister of gasoline and a road flare. As the mentally defective followers began spraying bullets all around the reception area, trying incompetently to shoot up the two nurses that had dropped to the floor upon sight of the first gun, the preacher threw some of the gasoline at the furniture and floor before lighting up the flare. He held the flare in the same hand with his bible and the gasoline in the other.

The sounds of police sirens could be heard coming from outside the building, soon accompanied by the distinct thrumming air horns of fire trucks. The hospital's fire alarm bells were triggered by central security that began calling out for immediate evacuation of patients through the public address system loudspeakers, directing people away from the Rutledge Avenue doorways and back towards the main MUSC complex or the Calhoun Street emergency exits, away from the gunmen. As the lone security guard on shift tried to find shelter enough to aim his Sig Sauer 9mm pistol without getting mowed down by the group of elderly mad-people, he tried to attract their attention so the nurses at the desk could crawl away to safety and escape. The middle-aged guard's plan worked too well since three of the gunmen turned to aim at him and, in lucky incompetence, they shot through the corner of the wall and the chair behind which he was kneeling in hiding, thus hitting him repeatedly in the head, neck and shoulders, killing him instantly.

The cleric raised the can of gasoline above the head of the small boy to douse him in volatile liquid, chanting some sort of prayer as he did. When the boy panicked at what he understood was the coming of his death, one of the burly overweight old men next to the priest punched the boy in the head, knocking him to the ground almost unconscious. "Know yar place in life, nigger slave!" The adult screamed, spittle flying from his mouth as he shouted more insults while kicking the prone child in the gut, legs and head several times to make him truly unawares.

Finished with the small task, the preacher raised his croaking voice again over the now silent lobby hall. "Alright, ye faithful men and women o’ Christ our Gawd! Take up them tools of Purification as was given you's and spread the Light and Cleansing to it all! Amen, I said! Make it all burn! Make all them crook-nosed bagel eaters and their nigger slaves BURN! In the Name which is Holy, Jesus our Christ, do I command and compel you’s all!"

One of the elderly white women walked close enough to the reception desk to see over it, looking down upon the two nurses lying prone on the debris strewn floor. They had escaped gunshot wounds but had been injured when the security glass panel that separated the staff from clients exploded under the volleys of bullets aimed pell-mell across the room at waist height. They had multiple scratches and bleeding cuts from the flying glass shards but nothing fatal. That would change. Lifting her old battered Vietnam-era M16 rifle towards the two cowering nurses, the woman spat out venomously "Die, niggess bitches! Die with the knowledge that we do God's Work today and you's foul necromancies won't sully Pure Americans no more! We don't need no doctors poking at our brains! Brains are useless! It's FAITH that gives life and health! If ye be's faithful to GOD then you's be healthy! Take that message back to Satan, you whore-spawns, and don't ya be coming back to OUR Christian World ever ag'in!" At which she pulled the trigger and emptied her entire 60 shell magazine in the two women, furniture and office machines, spraying around everything she could in her clear ineptitude with her weapon.

With the applause and cheers of her preacher and followers in her ears, the woman took a pipe bomb from her coat and set the simple fuse on the device to trigger the bomb when it sensed movement in its range that wasn't wearing a 'safety' radio-frequency tag to tell it to stay put calmly. One of their crowd was an amateur electronics builder who had served as ordinance and explosives expert during the Nam war fifty years ago. He had built the devices and made them simple so that old folks without training could operate them safely, even with arthritic hands or severe Parkinson's shakes. "No
training required for my pretties” he had told them last night. He was right about that.

The small group of delirious rabid religious fanatics began to walk slowly around the hospital building, shooting at people they met, setting bombs and using cigarette lighters to start small nuisance fires in the filing cabinets or trash bins as they moved up the stairs to the higher floors. None of them had any plans to survive this morning’s events. All of them were over 65 years of age with severe health issues and limited mobility of legs or arms. Two had been recently diagnosed with diabetes bad enough that one was becoming blind while the other should have both legs amputated in the coming 6 months to stay alive just a few more miserable years. Two women and three men had begun experiencing mental illnesses in the form of memory losses, time-sense disparities, perceptual delays and troubles staying focused on their immediate reality. Not a single one of the 12 'disciples' that had come with the 91 year old preacher wanted to stay alive to live through losing themselves to disease and oblivion.

The geriatric predicator stayed in the lobby so he could harangue the policemen and rescuers if they dared to show their faces to interrupt his Holy Mission of Cleansing against the foul necromancers that followed the unholy Egyptian dogmas of cutting brains to extract the Faith and Creed out of True, Pure, followers of God’s Light and Creed.

As the sounds of gunfire petered out with distance and the diminishing reserves of bullets, the old man cried a steady flow of joyful tears. It was just like the good old days, back in his childhood, when the Klan would gather the townsfolk on a Friday evening to preach, apostolize at the crowds, playing hymns and choirs in the background as the Strong Men mounted the podium to speak of Authority and Power under the One True God of White Christian America. They would light ablaze the giant 60 foot tall cross and, when they were lucky enough, they might even have a nigger to whoop raw and noose up to the cross as it burned deep into the night. Oh, good times, his childhood had been! Such good, clean, family fun it had been!

As the medications and religious fervor that had allowed the defective geriatric crone to stand all the way from the car to the lobby finally ran their course, fatigue set in and he started to sway and shake worse than before. An episode of confusion swam visibly through his eyes as he gazed questioningly around the place to try and figure out where he was and why it was all so damaged with the stench of car fuel in the air. Urine flowed down his trouser legs but he didn’t feel or smell it, too used to that particular odor in the last three years to remark it anymore. A small burp of gas eructed from his mouth, carrying out a minute amount of bilious vomit composed from ill-digested pills, toasted bread and coffee. Hearing a soft pitiful moan from near his feet, the cleric looked down to see the unconscious little black boy, lying battered and bloodied on the floor, who was making efforts even in his state, to try and wake up to save his life. The priest didn’t recognize the child but thought it was Just and Proper that he be beaten down and set at his feet like this; he was negroid and such low-born crass should never be allowed off the floor or else they would think they could run the country in the stead of white people.

Sensing suddenly the weight of the heavy book and torch in his hands, the old man looked at them curiously, uncaring that he had almost set himself ablaze with his careless handling of the fiery roadside flare. He opened his old family Bible to the dedication pages in front and saw the piece of cheap paper that had been glued there by his own hands no later than this morning before their Holy Mission was undertaken. It explained that he had been suffering memory loss and personality disorders for almost 20 years now and this was the last few days of true cognizance that he had left. If he wanted to make a difference in the country, he had to act NOW while he could still move about and give orders to his small congregation composed of his eldest children and in-laws that still lived and followed the True Faith, as he had preached unto them for all his 91 years of life. A short basic description of the mission and tools was added, with a prayer at the end for good luck.
Seeing this, the last coherent message ever written by his Faithful hand, the preacher of hate, racism and terror remembered why he had come here this morning. He had seen on the news last night the depravities committed by that despicable little jew-boy who fled up north to avoid the Authority of his father that had been confirmed by none other than the President himself. Traitors and bastards, all them olive-skinned bastard juden! But, the father had converted! He was a messianic jew, now! And that was a worthy, respectable endeavor indeed! So the old priest had seen that the 15 year old kid had become some sort of champion head-shrinker and made the connection to his preachings: psychiatry and neurology are Satan's tool to make True honest worshipers into lobotomized puppets. The conclusion was simple and clear: kill all the shrinks and burn the hospitals. True Believers didn't need anything but Pure Faith; God would heal them back to full health anyways, so why bother keeping up places that were nothing more than glorified butchers' shops and torture halls for heathens?

With his last act of 'mental coherence', the preacher splashed the rest of the gasoline on his body and legs, dropping the canister to the floor carelessly as it was now useless. He dropped the lit road flare on top of the unconscious child, watching gleefully as the nigger floor-stain was consumed by cleansing fires that soon crawled along the wet oily floor to climb up his legs and chest, spreading the Purification to him at long last. He would die in this world, as all good things did, then be Reborn in the Kingdom of the True, Pure, Christian Lord and achieve Redemption from all the crass and depravities this defective world of heathens and disbelievers had imposed on him his entire life.

"There is a God in Heaven and He is Just! So was it Scriptured in the Bible, in the Time of the Romans, in the Time of Prophecy! Amen!" he screamed as the flames reached his face and pain made him fall to the floor in crippling agonies, never to rise again.

(Eastern America; 06:45am)

The conflagration was massive. The entire neurology edifice was engulfed in flames fueled by the pipe bombs of the attackers and the chemicals in the pharmacological laboratories in floors two and three that ignited or detonated, spreading outward shrapnel from the glass and metal containers. Then the natural gas principal pipe was ruptured by a sabotage explosion that created a breach topped by a 120 foot tall plume of fire. Seconds later, several nuisance fires became infernos in their own rights because the fanatics had opened the faucets that normally feed pure oxygen to breathing regulation devices for patients in pulmonary distress. All these sources of fire and extra fuel caused a calamity like none other in the state's history; all 12 floors of the hospital's neurology department were ablaze in less than a quarter hour, never allowing anybody any time to evacuate to the other buildings or the streets for safety and succor. Since the attack had happened before the official wake-up and breakfast at 08:00am, almost the entirety of patients were still asleep and only the small night staff, shortened for the holiday period, had been present. It was never enough to help anybody, not even themselves.

The hospital burned for almost 27 hours straight due to all the chemicals and drugs that had spread or the liquid fuel that some of the attackers had spread around as they climbed the stairs to spread death and misery before their own ends. The flames were so bad that they spread across the quad to ignite the other edifices of the hospital complex, but those were empty of patients and staff by then. Still, the fire destroyed over five massive important buildings and killed directly over 200 sleeping convalescent patients and 22 staff. An additional 36 patients from the critical care and immune-therapy quarantine zone of the other buildings died in the following hours from being disconnected from the life-support devices they needed since no replacement machines were available anywhere in
the city. With 258 victims confirmed, it was the largest hospital fire and the deadliest terrorist attack in the histories of both Charleston and South Carolina.

Despite the tears and pleas of the innocent, it didn't stay the biggest for long.

We see the storm clouds gathering

(Criminal Minds – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 14:26pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 07:26am

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 04:26am

Malfunction Junction; FBI emergency & civil defense bunker

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Hidden deep underground in one of Birmingham's most central sectors, the FBI's emergency crisis management facilities for the state of Alabama were quite impressive. Roughly 500 meters on each side like a perfect square, six levels in total, buried an astounding 200 feet beneath the surface with the added visual decoy of the massive 'Malfunction Junction' roadway bridges and overpasses built right on top of the bunker. This emplacement was truly secure as it could be accessed only by underground tunnels that reached the surface in-between the public-use highways. It looked from the public perspective like access ramps to the construction zones of the pilings and road decks, something banal in this day and age of colossal concrete monoliths. A few flashing lights and signs warning to wear safety hats, hard boots and goggles when accessing the worksite complete the disguise easily enough that nobody had ever bothered to ask questions since the facility was built in 2013.

People might start asking those questions now however, as they most certainly saw the motorcades of black SUV's coming out of traffic to enter those reserved off-ramps that now suddenly had concrete and steel pillars topped with automated cameras and weapons turrets to manage inbound vehicles. The long lines of heavy black trucks made many morning commuters frown in curiosity as they all seemed to go the same place, but the event was quickly forgotten to the woes of Christmas shopping and impending family meetings.

The inbound trucks all carried a variety of FBI and other Federal-level law enforcement people into the safety of the central arrival bay in the topmost level, dropped them off and continued on their way out of the sub-structure via another off-ramp connecting to another set of highways on the other side of the 'Junction' hub.

The arriving personnel were quickly put through a set of scanning arches guarded by canine patrolmen whose dogs were trained to sniff explosives and several toxic chemicals used for explosives, incendiaries or poison grenades. Each person was submitted to a fingerprint scan, retinal scan, voice print match test and handwriting match test while their luggage was searched on a metal table next to the questioning station. The arrival lobby could process 12 candidates at the same time and so had four rows of twelve three-seat couches (144 places) to make people wait in case they had too many arrivals in a crunch. And that was the case right now; half the seats were taken by people and luggage, all twelve scanning stations busily processing personnel as quickly as they could. The extensive battery of tests however meant that they would always be taking roughly 10 minutes per individual at the shortest.
Once accepted inside the secured area, the people were marched towards the stairs and made to walk down three or four flights to the dormitory zones then got assigned bunks per agency they belonged to. Men and women were put together with little more than inch-thick mobile plastic partition panels to separate the bunks and common areas with almost no privacy except inside the enclosed bunks themselves. Even then, there was no soundproofing and every breath, gas or burp was heard by every person in the 9 bunk clusters. And they were clusters, not rooms. These levels had been built with long wide corridors in which the beds were stacked three high and grouped on each side in a way that shaped pairs of alcoves with a small common zone in the middle of the walking lane. All washrooms were communal, and the only facilities separated by gender in the entire bunker.

As hundreds of people filed into the two sleeping levels and placed their belongings or work materials in the foot lockers and standing steel cabinets, they also read the documents given to them upon entry. From those they would get the schedules for the mandatory medical checkups in the infirmary, the open hours for the commissary and cafeteria, as well as... The shower stall schedule and number that was assigned to them. A glorious fifteen minutes of sonic & Ionic waves, not water, followed by five minutes to brush their teeth and hair then move out to leave the place for the next person. Given the ratio of people attributed to each washroom, the showers were assigned in three 'rush hour' groups to cover all three shifts and then there were the free-for-all 'off-time' periods. Laundry room usage was similarly managed.

Oh, joy! The bureaucrats who did these schedules must have been in brown-socks heaven!

The special agents, uniformed officers and judicial office workers all found their assigned bunks and lockers then proceeded to change clothes into the more practical dark blue BDU’s bearing the FBI crest and logos of the service sector they usually worked in so they would be easy to identify, even with the flak jacket covering 75% of the upper body. Shoulder patches and armbands were such useful inventions, as were the ID cards manufactured like credit cards out of pressed thermoplastic with a photo of the person, a magnetic strip, an optronic chip and an RF-ID tag, all optimized for quick-swipe and Wi-Fi devices. Once the personnel had their change of clothes on with their ID badges and cards well positioned, they looked at their schedules and went to their assigned positions in the multitude of tactical or support departments of the massive underground enclave.

Deep in the sixth floor, the machines that kept the bunker alive thrummed with electricity, pressurized cold water pushing through to the few wet systems above while tempered humidified and ionized air was turbine fed through several kilometers of ductworks to keep all floors and sectors filled with cool breathable atmosphere. A set of enclosed severely isolated rooms in the middle of the floor housed the massive supercomputer Cray-Apro XK8 Cloud-Bank assembled in 2014 that was still to this day one of the fastest and most reliable HPC (High Performance Computing Cluster) in the USA. It was outclassed only by the World Bank's San Francisco regional office machine constructed in 2018, the Wolenbahn WOL-01/A Neurotronix Torrent-Surfer built by the very same genial teenager at the center of the conflagration they feared was imminent.

The higher level personnel that were classed as SSA (supervisory special agents) or above were directed to the second floor where the main situation management hall was located. It was big enough to hold two hundred remote surveillance desks for the active overwatch of almost two thousand events or zones simultaneously along the tactical planning table which could sit 36 senior managers. From this room, the state's law enforcement leaders could gather to centralize all police and civil defense activity for the entirety of Alabama with the immediate surroundings in Birmingham having priority since they couldn't help anybody if they weren't alive and operational to do so.

As the top leadership arrived, got situated and changed then came up to the Ops Hall, they were able to witness the preludes for the unfolding catastrophe that could potentially turn into a tsunami of lies,
hate and violence horrendous enough to swallow the entire country thrice over before it stopped. The
senior agents, officers and civilian managers could only clench their jaws to hold in the cries of rage
and despair as they saw attacks against police, national guard and even non-armed services like the
firemen or the paramedics being reported by the public news agencies then confirmed by internal law
enforcement channels. All the way down the eastern seaboard there were several dozen major
incidents that resulted in hundreds of deaths, tens of buildings ablaze and as many vehicles wrecked.

The common denominators of these attacks were always the same; racism or anti-government phobia
created and fueled by religious bigotry and sectarian disjunction from reality. Several of the
monitoring desks had signified to the leaders that there were hundreds of private radio or TV
channels owned by churches that had begun transmitting sermons of virulent hate, openly telling
their followers to take arms to defend and impose the Faith unto heathens and the hidden deep-state
accomplices of the Beast. Added to this were several thousand fanatic cultists taking to social media
on the Internex to liaise with right-wing militias and neo-nazi gangs in the hopes of coordinating
enough armed people to stage violent protests that would scare jews, blacks, browns, yellows and
mixed-race bastards into leaving the country altogether or else they wanted 'Christian Rule' terror acts
to shut down or destroy any place of worship that wasn't a christian church. Several neo-nazi or
white-power militias had posted monetary rewards for who brought them the corpses of muslims or
jews in an effort to convince people who were economically desperate to join in their depraved
movement.

Here in Birmingham, there were protests gathering in front of the Family Court building, the DCFS
edifice, the central Police Station and the FBI regional office. Several hospitals reported having
gotten death threats on their voice boxes or email servers telling them to "Stop trying to pull people
away from God's Holy Plan with poisonous drugs and the lies of psychiatry, otherwise the New
Inquisition will punish you".

In several districts of the city, small groups were walking the streets with homemade fliers, trying to
convince people that the federal government would seize and sell their children if they weren't 'good
white christian kids'. The solution proffered by these groups was that the parents should nominate the
priest who printed the fliers as 'spiritual guardian' of their kids, thus guaranteeing in public their
baptism, christian loyalty and protection from over-reaching federal agents. Anybody who wasn't
white was simply told that "their kids should be safe as nobody would want them" to serve in the
army, navy or other functions anyways since the White House was after 'decent trustworthy
servants', not mongrels and heathens. The bunker's overwatch managers took the names of these
preachers to lodge charges against them in person and their groups at large for fomenting fear, hate,
riots and active sedition. The bunker dispatched arrest orders as fast as they saw the situations and
accumulated the evidence to back it up in court, although with Trump's decrees in place, nobody
knew how that would play out.

As the clock above the three main monitors reached 07:52am, one overwatch desk signaled an alarm
in progress at the UAB's Children's Hospital and its adjoining Pediatrics Primary Care Clinic and the
Adolescent Medicine Clinic across the street. When several monitoring desks were pooled to scan
the zone and find the cause, they found that five different groups of 5 to 8 people, all heavily armed
and wearing body armor, had led a coordinated attack to invade those three sectors of the University
of Birmingham in Alabama (UBA). They were trying to do room-by-room sweeps, destroying
medical equipments and forcing children, parents and staffers to kneel in prayer at gun point,
shouting loudly that "Science was a pack of satanic lies and medicine never healed anything". The
leaders claimed loudly over the din of protesting medics and patients that "Only Jesus and Faith can
heal people, but only if they proved loyal and worthy of such miracles".

Apparently, the one and only way to know who was worthy of miraculous healing was to disconnect
all machines and medications then make people pray until God revealed the worthies by letting them
live whilst the traitors and hidden satanists would see their kids die in their arms. At that moment, the self-styled 'combatant preachers' who led the militia teams would judge them and have their 'Faithful Paladins' execute them like the anti-Christian, anti-American scum they were found to be.

Similar situations were erupting slowly all over the state but in some cases they stopped abruptly when the innocent civilian population decided to take up arms and repel the fanatics with the same tactics and weapons as the cultists used. In such cases, the incidents were rather short but inevitably ended in mass casualties with both sides of the fight decimated beyond hope of recovery. By the time the clock indicated 09:30am, there were about a dozen 4-alarm fires raging in Birmingham's districts, including the UBA's Adolescent Medicine Clinic since several teenagers and parents had decided to get nasty with the attackers. By the internal recordings, about a dozen youths, all in terminal phase with diverse cancers or tumors, had ganged up against the terrorists and bull-rushed them with scalpels or pieces of furniture to cut and bash them. Many young people had been shot or stabbed to death but each and every attacker in that building had died inside of 40 minutes of setting foot in the building. The truly depraved act happened when the 'combatant preacher' of that team was killed. His death triggered the life monitoring switch in his clothes to detonate the incendiary bomb-vests worn by his bunch of monsters thus causing a massive conflagration right in the ground floor of the hospital that blew out the windows and set fire to the floor, walls and ceiling at the same time. Several innocents were killed by the blast's pressure wave, shrapnel and flying dollops of ignited fuel-oil. It was an act of monstrosity that would mark the minds and souls of Alabama citizens for decades to come. The police SWAT intervention to clear out the other two sectors of the UAB hospital were met with similar results; the terrorists all fought to death and exploded upon their preacher's demise. The entirety of the university's capacity to heal sick children or do research on infantile health that took decades to build had been set ablaze and would burn out of control for three days before the flames ran out of fuel to consume.

Them there waters be a' risin'!

(NCIS - NO – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 15:41pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 08:41am

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 05:41am

Naval Air Station - Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans

Plaquemines Parish, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

The guards at the naval base along the shores of the Mississippi River in the Belle Chasse area of the Plaquemines Parish were busy closing wire fences, setting sand bag defensive emplacements and a small diesel powered forklift was busily taking inch thick steel plates from a flatbed truck to pile them up on the grass next to the pavement. Those steel slabs would be used shortly to create above-ground bunkers so that the perimeter guards could take shelter if they were attacked by groups carrying heavy weapons, something which had a high risk of occurring these days.

The problem with Louisiana was that like many southern states of the USA it had a large segment of it's territory that was undeveloped to the point of being completely wild. The difference with other states though was the water; the sheer surface and quantity of water in Louisiana was a blessing as they couldn't ever experience a drought but the flip side was the annual flooding and the immense variety of animals who always invaded the homes and companies every day because the lakes, rivers, canals and bayous were everywhere in the state, thus giving the critters easy access to human dwellings. This also meant that even when you decided to build something permanent, so much of the ground was a soggy muddy mess that it limited where and how you could build along with the
kinds of land usage.

Such wild lands conditions with vast tracts of swamps and marshes that could only be reached by boat or on foot were what historically caused the Louisiana people to develop their rich culture of gathering, hunting, trapping and fishing inland as much as on the ocean. To this day, thousands of people went just outside of their backyard to forage in the bushes and streams to find their meal or work product since the wild nature was always so close at hand, even in the hearts of the big cities. Unfortunately, the very legitimate need for guns and other weapons to hunt or trap so as to feed one’s family or supply the fur & meat trades led to several problems because obtaining a firearm had become so easy in the last 50 years. On top of loose gun ownership and usage laws for law-abiding citizens, there was a huge black market in smuggled or illegal guns that thrived because the vast marshes that composed about a quarter of the state were almost impossible to patrol or watch over in any coherent way. Since these marshes were in the southern most tip of the state that protruded into the Gulf of Mexico, that meant that criminals could pass from foreign countries over the sea to touch land in uninhabited zones of the swamps to then ferry their merchandise up the bayous and rivers into the heart of the state, and then the rest of the USA at large.

There were many, many illegal guns hidden all over Louisiana, not because the people were bad or worse than elsewhere, but because the geography and climate facilitate the situation all year long. And that meant that in a situation of anticipated riots, civil unrest and possibly open warfare in the streets, the police and military had to obligatorily think about those big high powered assault rifles, machine guns and even grenades or RPG's that get smuggled in all over the sea shores where nobody watches.

Thankfully, the majority of the citizens in Louisiana were decent, hard-working folks who didn't want to hurt anybody. The bad luck of the draw was that two or three handfuls of utter fools sitting on large caches of guns and explosives would soon be making enough racket and damages to make it look as if the entire population had rioted twice over in the same day. The civil emergency planners had taken the statistics into consideration when they elaborated the defensible zones and guard schedules all over the state. Some zones in the northern part would be easier to protect as they were drier, had more firm ground to build on and far less bayous or streams to float a canoe with a sniper around the static defenses. In the swamps, they would need to be extra vigilant as those zones would rely on scanning with pole-mounted cameras and rooftop automated gunnery turrets that were operated-by-wire from secure underground bunkers in the protected areas inside the military bases or police stations.

As that stood, the Naval Air Station - Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans was an important part of the defensive array of NOLA. The city had always been a navy town with thousands of sailors coming and going every week. Ships came to New Orleans to give crew shore leave, commit repairs, resupply and then leave after a week or two of hard work and harder partying in the bars and brothels of the Mississippi Queen's blue and green bosom. Unfortunately for the CD planners, practically everyone, his dog and the mutt's fleas knew full well how important the Navy base was to this city and how it served as a choke-point to control traffic on the river while serving its primary purpose of coordinating surveillance and defense for the entire southern part of the Louisiana coastal areas.

If anybody wanted to knock the USA a bad blow, all they had to do was find a way to make the Navy shutter the base or place it on lockdown for a few days and the trick was done. That vulnerability, relatively isolated position in the greater metropolitan area of NOLA and the proliferation of easy to buy guns with so many damned canals and foraging trails all around the base perimeter had forced the commandant to gear up his people faster and harder than might have been deemed wise in other cities or climates. Hence the construction of steel plate redoubts and sand bag machine gun or mortar emplacements at critical road access points.
The base commandant however was presently swearing a storm in English, French, Cajun and Spanish as he contemplated the air view map of his base complex; the damned fucking big hole in is right flank called 'The Mississippi River' left several kilometers of unfenced, barely watched shorelines. That had to be changed ASAP or they would find bodies floating in that river come lunch time. Not that they didn't occasionally find a floater lazily passing by like a lost tourist, but usually it came from deep inside the state, not from his base or his men, so he didn't panic about those.

The other headache for the general was the fact about ¾ of his compound was occupied by civilians. As had become the US military tradition since the early 1900's the families of the servicemen had the right to lodge, live and even work on base so as to receive the few measly benefits they were entitled to due to the enormous sacrifices made by their loved ones. As such, most of the Joint Base's constructions were actually the houses, apartment buildings, stores and workshops, even some schools and places of worship, everything a village would need to serve its residents. The genuine military buildings or worksites were swallowed up and drowned inside that swamp of basic daily human activity. Which also meant that the actual square mileage of purpose-built defensible or militarized structures inside his 'perimeter' was in reality negligible when compared to the whole lot.

In other words, his damned base was a fucking sieve and trying to think it could be secured into an airtight fortified position was a pipe dream come up with by some stoned out loon in some obscure basement level office in the Pentagon or worse, the budget planners in the Capitol. Neither of them worn out rusted 'tools' knew anything about the navy, army or defending anything worth saving if it wasn't their own oily hides. Washington DC would be relatively safe as it sat on firm ground with not that many rivers and no swamps to worry about. The folks down in Florida, Louisiana and parts of Texas couldn't plan the same way if they wanted to keep safe. Not that their opinions about their reality was ever asked all that much when the time to make decisions came.

Passing a rough calloused hand over his bald head, the general turned to his senior staffers and said "We're fucked harder than a willing sailor who paid his whore for it, people! But! At least, we know it, therefore we can plan around it. In need ideas and options, men! That there bleeding wound in our flank has to be secured somehow and more than half the land perimeter fences are falling apart so much that a kid could walk through and not realize where he's wound up!"

The women and men in charge of the navy presence in New Orleans bent to the monumental task of securing what had to be one of the most open and least structurally sound bases in the US naval organization. With tens of cargo barges cruising the river every day to deliver any kind of bulk goods you could think of plus dozens of small fishing boats and tourist crafts, finding a way to secure the city's main artery of commerce and life wan't gonna be easy.

The New Orleans MEPS inside the Naval Airbase was a relatively quiet little building on the corner of Blonski Avenue and Rinard Road. Clean, modern and recently built barely a decade ago when many of the military activities on the eastern side of the Mississippi were folded into the Naval base to give better work efficiency & support through proximity of all related services inside a single campus. MEPS means 'Military Entrance Processing Station' or, in daily speach, the way into the service. First you go to your local recruitment center where they make you pass some aptitude tests, a medical exam and do a background check via Internex. If the results of the tests are promising and you sign up, then you get a date for an appointment at one of the 65 MEPS buildings closest to where you were recruited.

As the second decisive step into becoming a member of the US military apparatus & community, the
MEPS was critically important for all that it was basically just a two storey office building that looked more like a neighborhood restaurant than a military posting. Then again, all they did inside was talk to people, push papers, search online for information about their applicants and, since around 2010, the entirety of the army's multiple laws, charts, training schedules, officer manuals, catalogs of services to soldiers & families, and all the general information kiosks had all been moved online. This meant a lot less employees to do the jobs and much smaller, ordinary, less conspicuous buildings to do it all in.

On this fine Saturday morning of December, the staffers at the MEPS were actually busy, but not with processing applicants as it wasn't their heavy season. That was more in July and August just after schools let out and the young ones just finished with high school or college got their diplomas and made life altering decisions. Winter break was for partying and gathering family, not joining the service and potentially changing one's entire world.

As the crew of the MEPS went about their morning routine of sweeping the floors in the reception area, getting the coffee pots on the burners, booting up their work stations and doing all the basic stuff any office needs done to deal with customers and bosses in the day, everything seemed ordinary. Except for the conversations between workers, some in camouflage fatigues, others in dark blue BDU’s and only a handful in civilian clothes who were quickly being directed to the building’s basement areas where the supply closets, armory and safety bunker were located. They needed to get changed and equipped ASAP before the first ‘clients' walked in the door at 09:00am.

The 'Noah's Ark' protocol had been activated by the Secretary of Defense late last night.

That meant that the morning routine had been slightly altered. It now included verifying the armored shutters in the windows. Setting a defensive gunnery emplacement at desk #4 in the far left corner with half-inch thick concave steel riot shields locked together to form a safety wall with a single slot to put a rifle muzzle through to shoot out at the enemy. Stashing pistols, flash-bang grenades and knives in the drawers of all of 4 desks just in case what the personnel carried was not sufficient to hold off an altercation. Packing two more foam fire extinguishers, a first aid kit and several cans of pepper spray in the cupboard under the coffee maker reserved for the clientele. Washing the restroom thoroughly since it served as dedicated emergency infirmary on the ground floor due to the folding baby-changing table big enough and sturdy enough to hold the frame and weight of a fat adult male. The cabinet containing three med-kits, thermal blankets, propane camp stove with fuel cans and some dehydrated soup tins and tools with four M16’s and shells besides the toilet was checked, cleaned and re-locked.

By the time the internal bell that reminded the workers to open the doors sounded, they were set up very differently than before. In fact, if it weren't for the practice runs held four times a year, none of them would have been able to recognize the place as their own. With a pair of marines standing on either side of the doors, the lieutenant in charge of the building opened it to the public. He was stunned to see a small crowd of people gathered in front of the entryway, waiting patiently in the still mild weather. As he looked over the group of about thirty or some humans milling around, he saw something that sent a chill down his spine. The group was composed mostly of adult women with one or two high school aged boys, but some of which looked to be only 11 or 12 years old.

This couldn't be happening. It was Saturday morning. The only people supposed to be lined up in front of his door on a weekend were the military mail and the Quartermaster's corps as all their regular supply deliveries were scheduled for when there was practically no intakes to process. Who the bloody Hells were these people and what did they want? Gesturing for the marines to come out and bracket him on either side at two paces, he walked out of the building thus immediately obtaining the attention of the small group. As he came closer to them, without the windows and shutters to alter his view of them, he could see more details. These people were not rich but not
miserable either, for the adults at least. The kids looked ordinary but several wore oversized saggy jeans showing off the butt of their shorts, flashy fluo colored sneakers or had hoodies pulled over their heads low enough that the rim of the cloth hid their eyebrows even as they looked at him with frowned angry faces.

Deciding that he wouldn't solve the situation by staying silent, the lieutenant asked aloud "What are you people all doing at this office on a Saturday morning like this? Could someone tell me what is happening here? Please?"

His answer came from one of the adult women, an african-american that seemed to be thirtyish years or so in age with a young teenager that stood by her side with a lot of ill grace, a mulish expression on his face and 'gangsta' style clothes with his rear hanging out of his jeans. The woman dragged the boy forward so she could push him at the soldiers. "Here. You take the boy and make a good Christian man out of him, just like the President said you would. I wrote out the permission letter here." She held out a piece of cheap lined paper for the officer to take.

Grabbing the sheet and reading it made his world a whole lot more complicated. The sheet referred to the two illegal presidential decrees that Trump had created at the beginning of the week that had become public knowledge just last night on every channel on TV. Raising his face to the woman he asked for confirmation. "You want us to take your – 15 year old nephew – and commit him for christian disciplinary redressment on a navy warship away from the street gang and public schools because he did petty thefts, bullying, armed assault, skipped school and you caught him with pot and ecstasy pills last week. Is this correct?"

The black skinned young woman nodded strongly just as she yanked the hoodie off the boy's head and laid a rough smack to the back of his skull. "Mongrel! Look at the man when he's talking to us! Oh, my poor sister! If she saw what her boy's become! You better walk the straight line, boy, or it's the strap for yo' tight ass! Them boys in the service, they know how to handle little pieces of kiddy trash like you! After years in the Navy, it ain't a shit-head like you's that'll scare 'em off!" Turning her angry face to the soldiers, she told them out loud "Well, he's here. I brought him, just like the Big Boss said. So you take him and do something with him. I tried. Gawd knows I tried! Ever since I got him when my sister died in the hospital about seven years ago and he ain't been nut'tin but trouble since. I spanked and strapped and slapped and even got my priest to try and help, right in open church, to pray for him to get better. No nut'tin made no difference. So you's take him now and beat some manhood into his skinny ass so my sister's ghost can be proud of him."

With a yawning pit of despair in his gut, the soldier asked the group at large. "Are you all here for the same reason?"

One older asian woman in her late forties came up front with the two young boys she watched over and they followed silently, fearfully even, in her wake. "Yes sir." she answered in a sneering nasal voice that made several in the crowd wince at such harsh aggressive tonalities. "My two sons here need a firmer hand than just a single mother can wield. I broke a cane on their backs and they still act out like animals! They need a man's solid, unyielding grip on their sorry hides or they'll run amok the moment you let go! I saw on the news last night that the country was finally going to do it's job of making boys into good Christian Men that serve the community. So, I searched on the web how the military hires the men and saw that the recruits all come here to get assigned their jobs. So, I came here with the boys to hand them over to you. Their bags are in the car, I'll get them when I know what room you make them wait in until you hand them over to one of your Faithful officers like the President said."

Raising his voice over the din of the approving adults, the lieutenant exclaimed: "Now hear this! We
have received confirmation by the Departments of Defense and Justice last evening in relation to what you are talking about. The decrees made by the President are ILLEGAL and we are ordered by the judges to not do it in any way, shape, or form. It has been the Law of the Land since 1979 that the USA cannot use the military as an orphanage or juvenile reformation center. We don't ever, and we can't ever, take in kids to do anything to them. The minimal age for any recruit is 18 years old; no exceptions, no special cases, and no orders from the President, the states' governors or city mayors or county judges can change that."

As the kids seemed to get livelier at his words, the adults got angry and shouted nasty comments at the soldier, even going so far as to calling him a coward, un-patriotic and anti-christian. One big burly white-skinned man with a bald head and short reddish beard who had a heavy, tight grip on the shoulder of a slight, fearful, red haired teenager screamed out at the officer in rabid loss of temper that made him red-faced. "You bastard! You fucking traitor! Nothing but a damned communist liberal! Your fucking kind's always trying to betray the President we elected to make OUR country Great Again! He promised us an America in OUR image! A Biblical World that the True God of the Christian Bible gave us to Rule in his Name! It's HIS Holy Law that Trump speaks aloud and you don't have the right to say otherwise! When a soldier goes against the President, that makes him a traitor! A coward! A God-damned jew-fucker whore that don't have a drop of red blood in his veins! No wonder Trump wants to get the kids when they're young and Pure in their souls! That's what's got you scared inn'it? You're afraid them kids will make good solid worshipful men to finally kick you liberal trash commies out of the services and remake our military Loyal and Faithful to God again!"

Trying to keep his temper in check against the stupid skinhead, the lieutenant addressed the entire group altogether in his loudest voice. "Ladies! Gentlemen! I am sorry that you were all made to come here this early on a Saturday morning but the news programs were all quite clear and perfectly accurate when they reported the events last night. The presidential decrees are illegal and inapplicable. We do not, and will not, take your children, and we certainly won't beat and rape religious belief and worshipfulness into them. THAT is immoral, illegitimate and most certainly ILLEGAL, not just for the military but at all levels of society, no matter who you pray to, or what color you are."

Hearing the crowd getting ready to protest he decided to break up the movement before it got out of hand and civilians made stupid decisions. Gesturing to his escorts, he had them step forward to aim their M16'S straight into the crowd, pointing out specifically the choleric fat skinhead and another, a black woman in her early fifties that was waving her styrofoam coffee cup around until she actually threw it towards the building's windows. That gesture was perfectly useless against the cement and steel structure but it marked her as the second most volatile temper in the group so the marine on the left aimed towards her and made certain to not be subtle about it so that he could scare her into calming down. The lieutenant took out his service pistol and visibly drew back the slide in a clearly threatening gesture that immediately had all the adults go quiet.

"Now, if any of you want to make a formal WRITTEN complaint about events today, you can go on the US military website and find the tab for 'services to the civilian population of the US' then browse that until you find either the 'public relations' or 'complaints' pages and fill out the forms. We will not be accepting paper letters and certainly not verbal requests. If you don't disperse quietly and politely in the next minute, I will call the military police to come and arrest you for trespassing and making a public disturbance as well as troubling the peaceful orderly functioning of an active service military facility."

As soon as the small crowd broke up and dispersed towards their cars parked all around on the near streets, the lieutenant exhaled a deep sigh of relief then holstered his pistol. He gestured the marines to get back at their posts inside as he gave the area one last long look to make certain no other
problems were lurking. Satisfied that the zone was emptying and nothing else was coming at them to create havoc, the officer went into the building and straight to his office to contact the chain of command with news of what had happened. As he sat at his table, he saw a slew of emails waiting to be read, most of them bearing a red ticker indicating they were priority messages from the central MEPS / Recruitment commandment of the US military services. With pursed lips and frowned brow, the officer was relieved greatly to see that most of the MEPS stations that were open had suffered similar situations and handled them about the same as him, so he was in the clear. He hoped that parents would get the message by the end of the day and stop trying to shove their kids at the navy.

As he typed his report and joined the film of what happened on the building's porch to his superiors while CC'ing his colleagues at the other MEPS offices, he could see through the security monitors that a pair of adults seemed to have brought their 14 year old son in to register him and they weren't in the mood to be turned away with a negative answer. After sending his message out, he searched for the local DCFS address and emailed it to the 3 functioning desks so that his workers could refer the families at need. He really hoped that the Christmas vacations would cool down tempers but was pragmatic enough to know better. You don't live long as a US Army Ranger if you don't keep your eyes on reality the way it is.

There be blood in them waters

(US National Anthem)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 16:16pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 09:16am

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 06:16am

Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority

Buffalo Bayou, Pasadena, Houston, Texas, USA

The Houston Police Department (HPD) was in the process of installing portable street poles in cement bases that had been brought by the municipal works department just an hour ago. These poles would then be connected to the water treatment plant's electrical grid to power the lights, cameras and communications suite built into the long metal pipes. The cops were happy to have this job compared to their colleagues in the center of town who were now in riot gear, patrolling on foot around the critical buildings of Houston while surrounded by civilians walking less than arm's length away at all times during their shift. Those blokes wouldn't have an easy day of it, they just knew it. The news casts since last evening had all been alarmist, panicky and would no doubt bring the worse characters out of the woodworks for law enforcement to deal with. Here, at the water treatment plant, they were isolated enough that they would only need to worry about monitoring their mobile camera poles for unusual activity and the plant employees who weren't that many anyways.

As the three men and woman lifted the tall heavy pole for the left side of the road, the water company's tool truck with a crane arm and nacelle came into view from inside the treatment plant's campus to assist the cops in their installation job. Most of the utilities workers inside the industrial campus were not convinced that society was about to collapse under the weight of what the idiot-in-chief in DC had done, anymore than it had in the previous 4 years. Then again, none of these guys had the basic training in Law and Politics that was mandatory course load at the police academy. The USA was a democracy and the population expected its policemen to understand at least the basics of how the culture and customs worked in daily life. It was also a way to make certain the officers applied the laws the same way across the board as much as possible. What the cops had access to in terms of information sources, surveillance recordings and the National Alert System operated by the FBI in cooperation with the State Troopers in each state of the Union meant that the uniformed
officers already had in hand several reasons to be worried. The briefing they had gotten this morning before leaving the precinct house to reach their assigned watch post had been anything but reassuring.

After a couple of minutes to salute each other and explain what was needed, the plant workers set the truck and deployed the crane/nacelle to finish lifting the street pole in place then hoisted the 'tree' that capped the top then screwed the cable connections between parts so that electricity and network signal could reach the cameras and diverse sensors. After that was done, the pros lowered the crane to its 'at rest' position while they moved the truck to the other side of the street in order to not have to extend the crane arm beyond a certain length to keep the guy in the cherry-picker basket safe.

As the tool truck was placing itself on the right side of the private access road, a pair of RV shaped vehicles escorted by two police cruisers were seen to move up North Richey Street straight to the water treatment plant. As they passed the security portico being installed, the cops and workers could see that each of the four vehicles were dragging a medium sized 4-wheel enclosed trailer similar to that of contractors. The convoy didn't even try to stop or signal the work detail as they passed by, obviously in a hurry to reach the final destination of their travels.

"What the Hell is that barge doing in this corner of town?" asked one of the cops to his colleagues as they trooped together in the middle of the street after the convoy was gone deep inside the agglomeration of buildings, warehouses and chemical vats that composed the treatment plant.

"That's a mighty big lot of coppers, it is" commented the aged trucker who had gotten down from his nacelle to join them with his partner. "What were them big rigs for, anyways?" the old man asked in his thick southern accent.

The policewoman answered in doubtful tones "That's a field command post in the front and the second RV is a mobile ICBN (incendiary, chemical, biological & nuclear) detection lab that they use when they find a nasty piece of crap like a meth lab or some artisanal bomb maker's shed. They must have found something bad in the intake pipes or stuck in the bayou just next to the plant's discharge."

Her colleague, older in age but at work in the HPD only since 2016 when he moved into the Houston area after living most of his life in Dallas, asked her interrogatively "What 'bout them trailers? I don't rightly remember seeing those in the garages downtown or hearing 'bout 'em in the training period back when I joined the HPD."

It was the second policeman who replied "Those are the emergency disaster camp trailers. They have all sorts of gear to put up and maintain a working camp for 24 people with electricity, water, climate control and a mobile comms hub to take over telephone and internet dispatching in an area. They can also slave the town's CCTV poles like ours and the existent traffic lights/cameras and have a program to identify cars, aircraft or boats then forcibly connect with their onboard comms to have an open line with them to manage traffic live. The ICBN lab is exactly how bad is sounds. They usually come in when they found materials that are explosive, toxic or radioactive; they identify the problem and tell the other guys how to solve it."

The younger man who had driven the tool truck wondered aloud "So, they're gonna make a camp inside our plant campus because they found a problem or because they want to make certain nobody hijacks the water outlets to the bayou? That doesn't seem so complicated. I mean, it's a water treatment plant; everybody who watches the news understands that terrorists want to burn down or take control of these kinda things. Having a cop camp here aught to keep things calm and clean for a while."

The four law officers nodded at his evaluation. The man had the clearest view of events. "Welp, let's get our backs into it, people! Them there poles aren't gonna go up all on their own!" The oldest of
the cops exclaimed while clapping his hands and making 'shooing' gestures at the team of workers. The brass could handle the rest of whatever happened.

{ SQ } - { Muddy streams } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 09:21am)

(Western America; 06:21am)

The Houston Police Department mobile command post #4 was a large RV based on the frame of the biggest commercially available such type of vehicle and the contents was customized specifically to answer the needs of senior officers in charge of search & rescue, fugitive tracking and SWAT interventions. The vehicle had limited off-road capacity but excellent mobility on paved roads and the driver had several monitors on top of his dashboard to view the images produced by radar, sonar, thermal cameras and variable light wave frequency cameras. These mobile outposts were a necessity in the Digital Age of Humanity as finding a missing child depended as much on putting out Amber Alerts as it did being able to find and read the social media pages of pedophiles and possible enemies of the parents. The setup served specifically to house the localized telephony network cell, the satellite phone relay, the CB & Shortwave station and the just created wireless Internex Signal routing cell. While having a clean toilet, shower stall and small service bar with some halfway decent coffee and a few sandwiches wasn't bad either, the entire rig's usefulness rested at 99% on the sensors, electronics & comms suite mounted in and around it. The HPD brass did not deploy one of the 6 mobile outposts lightly as they were costly to operate and somewhat fragile, therefore they had to be kept out of the actual conflict zone since the body was not armored in any ways.

The ICBN mobile lab #2 was a similar vehicle, but created to become completely sealed and airtight even when the four hydraulic sections were extended to allow for more working space. This one had several atmospheric sensors, cameras, antennae and little pipes to collect rain, snow or airborne particles to analyze the pollutants in circulation. There were even automated sensors capable of analyzing air & moisture quality as the vehicle rolled without having to stop. This was a piece of equipment even more costly and fragile than the mobile command fleet. Each was always kept well behind the defense lines and never exposed to conflict at all, unless the perps managed to bypass the defending cops and bring the problem to its doorstep. Given that only the Commissioner of Police could order the deployment of these labs, and he never did unless there was a clusterfuck in progress, you could understand that having both the MCP and ICBN-ML wasn't good news for the people inside any installations were they arrived.

Pulling in four trailers worth of emergency camping gear and portable infrastructure hubs certainly confirmed just how bad the situation was getting.

Police captain Denyse Raphael was an african-american woman and third generation of her family in law enforcement. She had joined the US Army at age 18 and trained to be part of the Military police corps which she worked in for 15 years before taking her honorable discharge to be closer to her kids and extended family. She did a year of professional formation to put her police skills on par with the civilian requirements and quickly got a posting at HPD where she had been slowly but surely climbing the ranks for 12 years to date. She had gotten promoted to captain a bit faster than normal on account of her experience in the MP's and her proven capacity to manage large disaster areas both in the military and in her years back in Houston in the 2017, 2018 and 2020 floods that struck the region repeatedly as the global weather patterns changed. The HPD commissioner and higher brass had begun promoting or hiring people with specific floodplain, forest fire and disaster relief expertise to help bolster the survivability of their vast extended metropolitan area as they had understood the new climatic reality regardless of the pro fossil-fuel propaganda coming out of the White House and Congress.
The result was that captain Raphael was amongst three handfuls of experts promoted specifically because she had lived through wide-area disaster relief patrol and support during her MP career. She had been deployed in the Middle-East, her assignments varying from patrolling the construction sites of US installations to escorting humanitarian aid convoys to establishing anti-looter barriers and check-points after a particularly violent earthquake in Afghanistan. The 45 year old woman had been as surprised as all her colleague captains when the emergency muster had sounded on her cellphone last night, with a Txt message telling her to be present a the materials hangar at 07:00am this morning to get her briefing notes, marching orders and emergency camp team. She had gotten an hour to read her briefs, ask the most pressing questions then get everybody in the four vehicle convoy on the road so as to reach her destination and get set up before 12:00pm noon.

The town councilors and police brass were expecting city-wide troubles; they had prepared mission statements that showed the mobile camp teams several recordings of news casts from last evening, through the night, until this morning. Since she was sitting in the command part of the rig, she could have the TV open on multiple news channels during the voyage from the mustering area to the water treatment plant and search the Internex to find complementary information about just how badly the situation was deteriorating across the country. It was horrendous. There had been multiple lone-wolf attacks and organized sectarian militia terror strikes in multiple cities all along the eastern seaboard, and the madness was propagating itself towards the western coast as the sun rose over each time zone.

She had called her husband to get the kids back inside the house and start prepping their home as if another great flood of 2017 was coming in. Since her man was a firefighter who had been in the US Corps of Military Engineers (Sea Bees) for a decade before going back to civilian life, their shared house was quite well built and defended in case of prowlers and looters. As long as the kids were inside and everybody was in either the first floor or the attic, they could be safe from anything and the three last flood events had not reached their plot of land so that particular worry, at least, was out of their minds. Now, if her 3 kids could all follow instructions without bickering, she could go about her own job away from home with her mind at peace.

The city’s emergency management of civil unrest & popular insurrection called for the establishment of police commandment outposts in locations of the town that were vital so as to guard them from vandals and seditious forces like the white-power militias and wack-job cults that seemed to grow in the southern states like plant pollen in summer. In this case, she had the dubious distinction of also supervising the ICBN lab because the bosses downtown were afraid that somebody would use the treatment plant to either poison the potable water aqueduct, poison the bayou or just destroy parts of the filtration devices so as to let raw sewage straight into the Buffalo Bayou and out to sea. While flushing crap down river would be bad, it would never be as bad as clogging the sewer lines to cause pipe back-ups in the houses around town or sending poison in the drinking water pipes.

Anyways, the plant was rather isolated where it was; road access was good but limited to just one 2-lane street otherwise you had to use a boat to cross over the 600 feet wide Buffalo Bayou or the 150 feet wide Vince Bayou so the emplacement did offer advantages from a defensive standpoint. The problem was that the chain-link fence around the place was old, rusted and torn with holes so that anybody patient enough to walk around the perimeter could find a way onto the plant campus. This fact was coupled to the number of small motorboats available around the extended Houston area which was a sea-side town, and therefore had a lot of water sports all year long. Hoping that a militia group or cult of fools would never be able to lay hands on a boat to go around the road access blockade was an idiot's pipe dream, especially on a working river like the Buffalo Bayou that was used as a commercial cargo lane all year long.

The secondary problem that captain Raphael faced was the semi-isolated location of the water treatment facilities meant that they would not be getting any sorts of support easily if they called for
backup. They were pretty much on their own once they were in place. That was why they had so much camping gear and vehicles; once the set-up was done, one of the cruisers with its trailer would go back into the residential area nearby to do bulk purchases then bring back the food and essentials ASAP. At the same time, the plant employees would be getting a crash course in New American Reality so they could order in extra tools, parts, consumables and even a few appliances like fridges and freezers to store a cache of food. The police officers would then incite them to call their spouses or families to have them come over to form a protected enclave in the slightly removed zone so that they could have extra hands to help in case of emergencies or just to have surveillance rotations in the monitoring rooms while the professional cops patrolled the outer perimeter.

Using the cameras on the command post and Google Maps at the same time, she could see the very worse situation that could be; to the west, south and east were massive petroleum oil refineries and to the north were the Buffalo Bayou with cargo barges and over that were other massive refining plants. In fact, the least dangerous manufacture she could see on the maps was the Houston Cement Company – East Campus that didn't have anything explosive, flammable or caustic in their hangars. Everything else all around for about 2 kilometers was massive cisterns full of oil in diverse stages of refining and mindboggling bundles of metal pipes that resembled the bowels of some unholy beast strewn around Pasadena town and the lower bayou districts pell-mell.

Her job in the coming weeks would be to mount a fixed command camp, control the safety and quality of water in the pipes and streams around the plant while also insuring that all civil services could maintain their comm lines active in her dedicated area. All this with a reduced crew of just 8 officers plus herself. No wonder the brass and town hall had given orders to encourage the water plant workers to bring in their families to help transform the isolated infrastructure hub into a fully sustainable, defensible enclave to pass through the social upheavals hitting them in the guts.

{ SQ } - { Raw sewage afloat } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 09:42am)

(Western America; 06:42am)

Captain Raphael shook hands with the shift manager of the water treatment facilities then the three foremen present to seal the agreement they had. The police would give them the planning and direction they needed while the plant's workers would be the arms to move and craft the resources available on the territory of the waste management plant. This also meant that the HPD would be able to establish a hard-wire link between the mobile command post and the plant's CCTV and security systems which, admittedly, were pretty basic and in dire need of repairs.

As the preliminary meeting wound down, one of the old wired telephones in the conference room rang, its ancient strident tin bell grating on all their nerves at once. The foreman closest to the device picked it up and listened to the woman on the other end as she explained the cause of her call. After hanging the handset back on its cradle, he told them the bad news.

"It was our in-house private security guard Laureen Larding, up in the camera room. She's just spotted something floating down the Buffalo Bayou in the middle of the current. Since she knows about our meeting, she decided to call us, instead of the police station like she normally would have."

"Call the cops?" asked the manager, "What did she see on there, dammit?"

The foreman shrugged helplessly; "A group of dead bodies tied together" he answers blithely. "And from what she says, there's like four o' them cadaver floats passing us by, right now."

Denyse grabbed the walkie-talkie microphone clipped to her shoulder strap, clicking the device
active to contact her men outside the building. "Okay, people, we have us some floaters in the bayou. Get them cruisers around the plant's management building to look at the river. Try to have your flotation jackets with you, the plant has a small 14 foot dinghy that we'll be able to borrow. I want you to get in the outboard boat while trailing a pair of lines from the winches on your cruisers to tie those body piles so we can drag them bag to the shore. It's the best we can do at this time. I don't think we can hope for any immediate response from the forensics teams. We'll just keep the bodies on the shoreline and find a way to freeze them or at least store them somehow until we can get support from downtown. Over."

"Ten-four, captain. We'll do our best to reel in your stinky fish outta the drink. Over."

Captain Raphael looked at the grim faces of the men in the room around her and sighed loudly. "There's only 8 guys with me, the four at the front will stay with us until the end of the day, but not come back tomorrow. I do have two forensics specialists in the ICBN truck, but two can't do the job of an entire morgue in a reasonable time-frame. The best we'll be able to accomplish is reel in the clusters of dead people and hope real hard for the best from then on."

What else could the water plant men say after that?

To serve humanity with honor

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 17:00pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 10:00am

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 07:00am

UEO Fleet shipyards; drydock 1500-B, command center

New Cape Quest, Florida, UEO Territory

Commander Oliver Hudson stood in the tenth storey conference amphitheater of the giant control tower, in the massive bay window that overlooked the actual drydock part of the installation: a massive cement coffer 1,500 feet long by 500 feet wide by 200 feet deep that could be filled with sea water in just a few hours to let pass the mighty ships of the UEO Alliance or its member nations. At present, the ship in residence for the last 23 months had been the ocean-borne mastodon SeaQuest DSV 6000, the biggest and baddest nuclear powered submarine ever built by human hands to date. She had been Hudson's guest at the UEO Fleet Shipyards of New Cape Quest to undergo one of the most ambitious and elaborate retrofits ever imposed on a working hull before. In a few minutes, the briefing would commence and Hudson would have the immense pleasure to instruct the ship's crew complement on the marvels of creativity that had been put into her massive belly.

Oliver had been intrigued when the opportunity to become project manager for the SeaQuest had been offered to him. He had been 43 years old when a group of captains and senior commanders were presented the basis of the project, three years ago. The ship had still been in active service but showing its age while the owner, the American Confederation that contained the USA, Canada and Mexico, was experiencing severe budget shortfalls and were looking for a way to either change the ship's vocation or sell it off to somebody. Given it costs about 150,000,000$ a year to operate the ship before even factoring in the salaries, benefits and pensions of the crewmen, therefore finding prospective buyers had been a backbreaking chore until Andrea Dre had shown a personal interest in both the boat and the many retrofit options the AC had been investigating.

SO, in 2017 the UEO bought the ship with all its conception and construction blueprints, work logs
and shipyard management books, to which were also added all the diverse options' drafts that the US and AC had been looking at to change the ship's usage to make it self-sustaining and self-financing. Secretary General Dre had some pretty pointed views and had a good idea of what she wanted the boat to do as its primary mission so after a year of drawing and planning, the blueprints were done and the ship scheduled for retrofit right here at NCQ where Andrea Dre could come watch the work in progress and supervise any changes or adaptations to the plans required as they came up. The finished boat was as much hers as it belonged to the drydock crews and the engineering planning committee.

When the raw retrofit project was presented to the captains and commanders along with the heavy burden of political and diplomatic involvement that would hover all around the worksite like a pall of gloom, every other candidate pulled out before the selection meeting even got called. Most candidates that had been pre-selected in fact just sent in a polite negative response by courier mail without ever setting foot in the conference room. At the end of things, Oliver Hudson was the only man seated in the meeting, no one else having showed up. He got the dubious privilege of a one-on-one meeting with the UEO SG Andrea Dre that lasted almost four hours before he decided that he wanted to take a chance, even if it meant gambling his career and his name. The project was just so damned crazy ambitious that it would rewrite the history of naval architecture and military management of active fleet assets for ages to come, but it was thought out and planned with a degree of excellence that Hudson hadn't seen to date elsewhere in 25 years of service. He took the job and never regretted it, even when Andrea made herself at home in his office enough to have installed her own desk and chair with an electric tea kettle and piled up tins of european biscuits on the service bar besides his coffee maker and doughnut box.

All diplomats and politos aside, the rebuilding of the SeaQuest had been a monumental pain in every important part of his anatomy for the two years it had lasted. Even dealing with the fallout of their ex-captain Marilyn Stark going nuclear on the Macronesians' fleet just before the boat was brought in hadn't been that hard or onerous to live through. Oliver would do it again in a cold New York minute if he were given the chance at a project like it. SeaQuest was both gargantuan in dimensions and a technological enormity that could twist the minds of lesser men. The drydock crew certainly had its share of explosive rants, burnouts and threats of bodily harm while throwing blueprints and scheduling books around along the totaled 36 months they had worked on this.

Oliver turned back towards the staggered rows of benches that were slowly filling out with every sailor, para-military, civilian employee and external company representative that would be working and living aboard the rebuilt ship for the coming 14 months tour of duty. The ship's original complement on her last deployment had been 201, she would now reach close to 350 and have far more and far better equipment than originally included in any plans the world had heard of before. Andrea Dre had splurged on proven traditional know-how, new naval techniques and cutting edge higher sciences that were fresh off the university drawing boards like no known government had ever done and added things for the crew and passengers' ease of life to boot. When the new ship took to the waves and the media were given the grand tour in about two weeks time, it would remake the popular opinion of what the UEO stands for and almost guarantee Dre's re-nomination as SG for the UEO Council. Nobody would call her 'Trump's paid patsy' anymore, that was sure.

At 10:15am every person meant to be present in the meeting was seated and logged in the system to unlock the monitors, keyboard and earphones linked to the Wolenbahn Conclave 3 beta Universal Translation & Ciphering Network (UTCN) that would allow anybody to follow the seminar, regardless if they spoke English or not, and it would even automatically create and pass the subtitles in the screen showing Hudson. At the synthesized bell tone, commander Hudson walked to the central podium and took the wireless earbud to place it in his left ear as the right ear already had the
wired earphone for the brand new Public Access, Address & Location System (PAL) designed by DARPA and Google Corporate Services that was being phased into operation across all the active military assets of the UEO Fleet presently.

"Ladies, Gentlemen... And politicians too, since we have an unfair few attending by comms... Welcome to the relaunch of the United Earths and Oceans Organization's biggest, baddest, and also now, it's finest ship in active service to date. On the top row of the main monitor, for your viewing pleasure, people, is the old version of the SeaQuest DSV 6000 that was valid until 2018, while the lower row has the new hull as she sits in her berth while getting supplied and readied to sail for her new tour."

Hudson smirked at some of the faces he saw; the expressions ran the gamut from impressed to interrogative to flatly worried. Damn, this was fun!

"As you can clearly see, the ship's morphology is visibly different in a big way and the internal works that were changed will impress you even more. Let's take it from the top then. The old version had 5 decks labeled 'A' through 'E' with the heaviest machineries located on deck 'C', meaning the parking silos, the main engines, main propulsion units, two of the dive planes and the one and only torpedo bay the ship had to its name. The deck nomenclature and overall usages have remained the same and 75% of the compartment names and addresses have also remained as the original blueprints indicate. Given the immense quantity of structurally installed systems, especially the life support, super computer core, parking silos, maglev tunnel and the Aqua-Tubes, we were pretty limited in how we could remove bulkheads so that the ship's structural and hull integrity were impacted as little as possible. However, as you all know, 'with great dreams come great upheavals' and so we dared like never before."

At these words, he changed the images on the monitors to show the insides of the CED level and animated a small film of how the landing platform opens and closes with the lift in movement. Oliver took a second to gaze around the room, seeing nothing but attention and interest on the features of the participants. This attitude was encouraging, especially from the boat's original people that had been kept on during the drydock work over the two years the retrofit lasted.

"Now people, you can see that the ship's profile has changed drastically on top, under and around the middle perimeter. The five original decks remain 'A' to 'E' while the new added deck above is the 'cargo elevator deck' (CED) and the lowest addition is the 'deep submergence works & services rigging' (DSSR) and as you can see, they don't add a complete full deck, just partial extensions in specific areas of the boat. The CED was one of those crazy ideas Andrea Dre came up with; take all 12 nuclear ICBM's out of the ship completely and replace the vertical launch pipes with a massive cargo elevator capable of moving a fully loaded Chinook helicopter or one our recently built UEO jet-copters, or even an MR-class sub-shuttle since the entire cargo shaft is as fully submersible and watertight as the original parking silos and the DSSR modules."

"The precise use of this change is that the SeaQuest is now the first submarine to ever carry a fully equipped, full-sized aircraft without having to dismantle it then store it in separate compartments to fit the ship's internal limitations like the Japanese did in WW-II. This will make cargo transfers feasible by ISO boxes up to 53’ in length while using aircraft, dock cranes or ship mounted cranes. As you can see, the elevator that moves up the shaft to become part of the landing pad when the roof opens doesn't go down all the way to deck 'E', it stops at deck 'C' thus allowing 2 full levels of cargo storage under it and one of the DSSR modules under that. Please note on the left-hand side of the main vehicle lift platform the presence of a brand new cargo box elevator that covers all seven decks of the ship's new frame, thus allowing to move cargo boxes with the brand new retractable cargo cranes in the CED and DSSR."
Hudson was pleased at the highly interested and approving nods made by the attendees. Some were even making handwritten notes on paper pads or touchscreen tablets for later study. It bode well for the reception of the other innovative features they built in.

"As you can see, we thought about making the interconnections between submarine and surface fleets easier to manage, and the loading of supplies & personnel much more adapted to the actual needs. We will no longer be manhandling crates and barrels into the ship, we will be using dollies, forklifts and cargo boxes to bring in palletized cargo like every other boat under the flag. That goes double for med-evac and transfers; we won't have to dangle a man off a rope under a helicopter to bring you a new doctor during a storm or wait 2 months until a glorified soup can of a DSV capsule is available in the zone to switch 6 crewmen and their duffel bags."

Oliver smiled widely at the next batch of novelties since he approved of these a great deal.

"Another addition on the topmost level are the two new gunnery turrets with 8 pulse rifles grouped in 2 quads that serve as CWIS (close interception weapons system) while the new 6" pulse cannon acts as main gun. A pair of retractable launchers on both sides of the turret each contain 12 medium range hydro-jet propelled micro-torpedoes with EMP/ionic wave warheads. You will also note the presence of small protuberances all along the now flatter top segments of the ship's hull; these are the LED tips of retractable post & rail fences that come up to help keep people from falling off the boat when you have EVA (extra vehicular activity) needed to rescue people or repair stuff manually in a hurry. In peaceful climate, it allows the ship to surface and let the inhabitants walk around the flattened top walkways to get some air and sunshine thus staving off cabin fever. This also means that you can welcome somebody aboard without raising the entire ship, using the CED or the sub-parking silos and some sort of sub-surface boat. You will note here, at all airlocks into the ship, we have installed into the doorframe a set of lights, cameras, sensors and comms relays including laser & infra red lenses. Hidden amongst these many lights are several emitters linked to pulse pistol mechanisms thus creating a local short range CIWS to defend each ingress port. Similar arrays with rifle or cannon emitters as needed have been set into all airlocks, access ports and venting grates to protect the ship from invasion."

Oliver was smirking even wider at the sights of so many experienced sailors practically drooling in envy and pride at the ship they would soon inhabit. Most had expected to be simple cogs in a dull boring machine; after all, the usual submarine has no visual imaging capacities, no windows and certainly not that many weapons to use. All the many systems to date meant more activity, more using their brains and skills, a lot less sitting around uselessly until they reached port and needed cargo boxes manhandled. No, the SeaQuest would not treat her crew the same as others, but she would not have the same types of crewmen, officers and technicians either. She would have much better than the usual.

"If I could attract your attention to the ship's bow and saucer section?" said Hudson while switching blueprints and zooming in on the desired section. "Here are side-by-side the exterior and interior of the ship's main bridge. You will note a few differences; the saucer is notably wider and longer because we actually sawed it off the ship and built a brand new one to accommodate the new equipments and facilities we wanted put in. As you can see, she still has 2 clamshell doors but they have been reinforced and they now have an emergency self-welding sealing mechanism to fight off any kind of leak, contamination or invasion to keep the bridge completely secure. Because of this, we had to install a pair of small wet-bath type (water toilet & sink, sonic/ionic shower) sanitation stalls at the back on the raised portion that goes over the Aqua-Tube. We put in place a service area between the toilets that holds two large fridges, restaurant grade drinks maker, 2 microwave ovens, 2 toaster ovens and a large grill with 4 gas hobs in it, in case electricity goes out. The cupboards under and above hold the dry foodstuffs, tablewares and cleaning supplies. Right in front of that we have installed 3 extra consoles to set in place the much needed networkers that will monitor all comms &
cybernetic traffic in, out or around the ship as well as be the electronic warfare and wiretapping force. The old comms console next to the sensor monitoring station is converted into another sensor operations chair. The two will now be split between the ship-mounted sensors which have been greatly improved, and the WSKRS or HyperReality Probe data feeds, as well as collating all sensor feeds from any dependent craft that are launched and remotely operated by SeaQuest, with or without living crew aboard."

Commander Hudson could only feel satisfaction as the sounds of excited murmurs rose in the amphitheater, many small clusters of the old crew getting into vigorous discussions about the novelties they saw and why the changes were made. To date, it seemed an overwhelming support for the complete product. Oliver waited five minutes as he drank some water from his chilled carafe then cleared his throat to continue. There was so much more to share.

"Now, most of you know just how blind the average submarine really is; your perception of external reality is reduced to an inch screen with green lines and shapes on black background generated by the computers that compile the radar, sonar and radiological data into a drab 2D image with precious few details and no depth. During her first decade and a half of service, the SeaQuest was the only ship to employ the brand new technology of drones: the WSKRS or 'Wireless Sea Knowledge Retrieval Satellites' that have helped so much, especially during DSV rescues and pollution analysis. The WSKRS systems have been maintained and improved greatly, mostly by having a living operator dedicated solely to their control. But, the ship itself proved incredibly vulnerable in case it lost those little metal balls; it would become almost blind and deaf. So, I proposed to Andrea Dre and she accepted most eagerly, that we add several structurally integrated clusters of cameras, sensors and comms relays at strategic points of the hull so that the ship could keep on seeing and hearing if all the drones, probes and signal buoys are destroyed or out of service somehow. This means that there are over 100 of these clusters all over the ship, with 21 spread in 3 rows of 7 just on the newly built saucer section. That increase in sensors, the weapons turrets on top and underneath and the extra internal space all meant that the weight tolerances were off, and the hydrodynamic profile was wrong too, so that's why it got ripped off and built bigger and much better. The turret now installed under the saucer is exactly the same as the two on the CED level."

After a short pause to let comments pass around, Hudson continued his expose on the marvels of the new boat they would get to play with soon.

"At the stern, you will find that four small turrets have been positioned symmetrically in the spaces between the joints of the dive planes. These are CIWS turrets carrying a quad of pulse rifles and a central phonic/ionic disruptor cannon, thus making the SeaQuest the very first ship to mount such evolved high energy armaments as part of her basic combat lines. You will then note that the flat ends of the dive planes, the ship's tentacles as they have been called in the past, are no longer flat but now have a weird raised hexagram shaped form. This is to house a set of long-range sensors, cameras and comms arrays to detect pursuit and incoming missiles from as far as possible while also providing structure to place weapons in the formerly defenseless arms. These balls shaped like an eye that sit in the middle of the hexagram's flat top are actually plasma lasers similar to the ship's main assault beamers that are located in the front of the bow and in the wing tips of the saucer section. That means that the SeaQuest now has genuine principal armaments to defend its rear against a capital ship, whereas before that, you had to shoot a torpedo from the front and have it do a U-turn to go back at the enemy behind you, thus losing precious seconds that let the enemy boat shoot you much faster and accurately. The other problem was also that the plasma lasers in the saucer's winglets were barely 1/3 of the strength the main bow array and had a limited range, plus you had to re-align the whole ship to line up a rear shot, again giving plenty of spare seconds to your enemy to shoot or dodge the coming beams. This will no longer be the case as all plasma beamers have been rebuilt and standardized at the same strength, range and targeting capacity, with respect to their possible firing arcs and safety exclusion zones. Aside from that, you can see these clusters of small red dots placed
along the four sides of each rudder arm; they are fixed-angle pulse rifle grade CIWS groups to keep away any object or biological that would have managed to move faster than the four main plasma weapons can track & shoot."

The mood in the conference hall was almost festive at the show of weaponry and just how many thick layers of interlaced defenses kept the ship safe now. It was a veritable motorized fortress compared to the old seaframe they had used for years. The crew leftover from that period were clearly daydreaming about how much safer and easier their jobs would be once they finished the shakedown cruise and had all the screws and nuts in proper order.

"Now, we will look inside the boat's full length on decks 'A' and 'B' because there is a whole lot of change in there. The old design had the boat's iconic 'Maglev' horizontal mover take up almost two decks of height and created a massive tunnel for about ¾ of the ship's total length. This created massive loss of structural strength and deep submergence durability as the entire right-hand upper quadrant of the seaframe was artificially weakened by the design choice. After a long, fruitful brainstorming session with the planning committee, Andrea Dre ordered that we rip out the maglev and replace it entirely with something far less 'energyvore' and much more size-conscious. So the floor and technical inter-deck structures were closed off to create a complete deck 'A' and the bottom part of the tunnel was regularized to maximize the new space and accessibility through deck 'B'. The new lateral mover is a dedicated, custom built, wheeled tramway with small 3 inch wheels assembled in four 'roller groups' with a pair at the front and rear of the moving cabin. The new machine's engines are a pair of lawn tractor sized power plants fed directly from ceiling mounted catenary induction rails, thus ensuring that the cabin will move at comfortable & safe speeds from now on while staying as silent as the original. The shaft floor is now uniformly smooth and unencumbered the entire length since the tram guide rails are instead mounted to the walls and ceiling therefore allowing you to park the cabin and use the shaft for moving furniture or cargo boxes horizontally along the ship's length if the usual corridors are damaged or jammed."

"The space freed up on deck 'B' has been designated as 'revenue bearing rooms' for the self-financing scheme. All the rooms on the ship's right-hand of deck 'B' have been completely redesigned to present one long corridor with only the suites' main entry doors visible; once inside you see an inner partition bulkhead with two doors. That is because each of these rooms will become a 'luxury corporate suite' with its own wet bath and 2 enclosed 2-bunk sleeping compartments. The main area will serve as all-purpose living, office & workshop space available for rent by selected corporate partners. Let's just say that with a base price tag of 250,000$ per month just for the room, then an extra 55,000$ monthly per person for insurances and common shipboard services, before adding the utilities bills like Internex bandwidth usage... Well... These are truly a damned fine luxury on any ship afloat and will make a nice revenue stream for the future."

That news got the attention of many sailors and civilian employees as that meant that there would be a lot less competition for the regular senior officer & crew cabins when placing the representatives of the companies that rent labs and machines during the year. It also meant that the ship's population would be more diverse and get a rather good boost in science and tech given the prices mentioned as only the top tier companies would have enough sub-sea activities to justify renting such a suite. On a side note, the elevation of the average socioeconomic profile for residency aboard ship would resplend on all the crewmen regardless of rank, thus making them all look a lot better in the eyes of the entire fleet and the world at large. "I served on SeaQuest" will mean even more now, passed 2020, than it did before and would open doors to new jobs or higher postings than they could have hoped for before the retrofit and changes in crew choice had occurred.

With a wide, satisfied smile on his face, Hudson continued onwards with more explanations.

"While there are some movements around the science labs and sea-deck, it's mostly space
management tricks to accommodate a few of our corporate partners that wanted to have their work spaces side-by-side so they could install bigger devices or have a private conference room setup directly inside their workshop or laboratory. While there are 'common' conference rooms on decks 'B', 'C' and 'D', those will now have to be officially reserved and paid by the hour for company use, similarly to how certain biochemistry or material sciences labs will be 'shared' on a paid hourly basis by those corporate delegations that don't need a permanent full setup of their own."

"That brings us to the other huge batch of structural and technical additions; the DSSR modules under the ship's belly. These are 3 new additions split under the main frontal section, the round one under the central sphere and the one under the main rear section. These new constructions contain a set of decompression/quarantine rooms, living areas and even a full services infirmary, all on a set of infrastructures and life support completely separate from the main ship to guarantee full segregation in the case of epidemics. The goal of these three modules is to make it possible to house a permanent crew of 24 professional divers experienced in underwater oil rigs, pipelines and cabling works without having to constantly get them in and out of decompression, or forcing them to live in cans for days at a time until they can breathe normal air again. This installation was dreamed up by Secretary Dre during a brainstorm with the UEO Council about ways in which we could render the ship self-financing. One of the corporate backers in England was complaining that there is a complete absence of private sub-sea rescue organizations despite the enormous increase in independent submarine colonies and manned extraction rigs. Andrea Dre caught the ball in flight and ran with it until this magnificent piece of convergence between military needs, civilian needs and corporate needs was born."

Commander Hudson switched the images on the monitors to highlight the DSSR level and its separate segments.

"These crewmen will now each have a permanent private room so they can retire alone to fight off stress and cabin fever when the pressure of living and working so tightly with the others gets too much. Each room is built with four solid pivoting bunks in case we need to bring in refugees from failed DSV ventures or damaged military subs, so the total capacity in the non-medical bunks is 24 rooms x 4 beds, all in the rear block. The front block is the medical & quarantine zone which has the exact same quantity and setup of 24 x 4 bunks. Each living & quarantine block has communal washrooms, laundry and recycling facilities set up the same as they are in the main ship. Aside from the sleeping arrangements, each block has a galley kitchen capable of producing 48 meals at once and a 48 seat dining hall, two different living rooms, two conference rooms, offices for the permanent doctors, officers and temporary civilian project foremen, and a small gym to keep up with the much more stringent daily exercise regimen that is mandatory for this cadre of workers. The central round section is where all the heavy machinery and DS-EVA suits are kept. The middle of the section is a circular pipe with a round iris hatch in the middle that allows to drop down winch chains, network or power cables, oxygen or water pipes, or set up the ship's derrick drill-rig to do sea floor prospection through sampling cores. This of course is clearly meant as a way to bill companies; we locate interesting places in the abyssal depths and they pay us for the maps, analysis and occasionally for the job of doing all the geophysics and coring surveys instead of hiring another private outfit that could take months to a year before they have a slot in their schedule to come in the area. Not to mention we will be working at about three times the depths that civilian DS-EVA workers are normally qualified and equipped to work."

Getting polite responses to this part of the presentation was pretty much what he expected so he passed over to the final set quickly, forcing people to shut up and listen.

"Now, in terms of structural changes to the boat's seaframe, we come to the last items and they are bloody major. Some of you may have noticed that the central sphere seems to be a bit bigger and also a bit more separated from the two other components of the seaframe. It's real. We chopped the ship in
five humongous parts right from the start, not just the bow saucer or the dive planes. The reason is for this; we discovered during her last year at sea that there was metal fatigue and warping in the longitudinal beams that traversed the joining zones between the bathysphere and the other sections. Basically, at each deep dive, the ship's entire frame was compressed then distended upon raising upwards thus causing a warping effect on the molecular alignment in the long beams and joints. The ship was essentially suffering from the same effect as astronauts get in their spine when they go to space for a few months and come back into Earth gravity. This needed to be fixed and, as you can guess, with a job of replacing that much structurally welded and bolted steel beams and girders, it became logical, economically desirable even, to think about the greater, more complex plan we used.

"However, we didn't just make the bathysphere more large and round, we rebuilt it's entire structural frame and re-balanced all the vertical posts along the longitudinal beams so as to handle the dramatically increased weight of heavy machineries, extra moonpool and crane winches that were part of the DSSR additions. This led to thickening and lengthening the jointing beams and girders between segments as well as thickening the receiver sockets of the beams in the forward and rear sections of the ship. All corridors, inter-deck crawlspaces, utilities ducts and horizontal tramway tunnel have all been severely re-engineered to the new weight and gravity center profiles along with re-armored bulkheads and localized extra thickness of the outer hull at critical inter-sectional joints."

"Now, since we were rebuilding so much and making the boat into a four-piece set, we decided to create new tech to palliate a critical problem in the SeaQuest's mission. We added heavily armored, solid-jointed hard-docking corridor arms on both sides of the boat. One of the most frustrating problems encountered in the ship's first 15 years afloat was the case of an incompetently designed private mining rig built with only the most minimal machinery and living facilities; which usually means only a single space parking and maybe 1 airlock with a docking collar. Maybe. Often enough, not even that much since the docking collar or airlock was used to park the crew's transport shuttle which, incidentally, was also the only escape pod of the colony. This was even worse when you reach depths passed 5,000 feet where even the MR-class shuttles can't go; only traditional heavy tonnage subs or the new Zundweil-class sub-ferry can go between 5,000 and 15,000 feet. Only SeaQuest and dedicated DSV mining platforms can go deeper. So, a set of retractable, armored, hard-jointed connector corridors were designed and incorporated to the ship's new systems to finally be able to effectuate those crushing-depths rescues or transfers of personnel and materials that are becoming so fundamental to our economic reality. You will see here on deck 'A' the joints for the 'regular' transfer corridors, with one fore and another aft of the bathysphere, on both left and right of the boat. A similar setup was done on the DSSR level to help create the armored airlocks & joints between the living, working and quarantine sectors while also allowing us to place 4 rescue corridors that mean the rescued people get taken right to the quarantine beds the moment they are aboard. This also saves us from the dilemma of saving someone from a sinking or burning boat only for them to get 'The Bends' upon entering the SeaQuest as happened several times in the past. The original decontamination & quarantine chamber on the sea-deck just wasn't enough to handle the workload and since it was never linked directly to the parking silos or docking collars around the ship's hull, the problem with rescuees getting decompression sickness would never have stopped happening. This new setup settles this."

Now that got a rave review, with even a few crewmen from the original complement giving out applause upon seeing the completed construction and the animation film of how the 8 armored corridor arms deployed and connected to the docking collar of a ship of colony. They were even big enough to allow movement of medical gurneys or palletized cargo with dollies or a small electric forklift. That was one hell of an innovation to put into a boat! And the central crane winches could even lower down a small rescue cabin, an armored diving bell seating six people able to go down to 25,000 feet and use the two docking collars built in its flank or bottom to hard-link, just like the
SeaQuest herself! No more leaving people behind to die alone in the dark depths, not on their watch!

{ SQ } - { We are ready now } - { SQ }

Commander Jonathan Ford stood up and walked up to the front podium which commander Hudson handed over quite willingly. The older man had his fill of public speaking for the rest of the year; this type of 'Project Reveal' was fun but damned tiring! And he still had the bloody TV interviews to do in the coming weeks and Andrea Dre would want to speak to him about it all, all through January until she calmed down and found herself another pet project to obsess over.

"Okay people! It's 11:45am, lunch is coming up, but so is our new captain! So go and get the boat as ready as you can, the old man is getting here at around 15:00pm and we want to be able to cast off with the evening tide! All hands, break ranks! Dismissed!"

Jonathan wasn't stupid; after the presentation they had and lunch around the corner, nothing he could say now would hold anybody's interest for more than a minute. Better send them on their ways and let the new CO make his own inspirational speeches when he got here.

Heal thyself, doctor

(Imperial March – Star Wars)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 18:00pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 11:00am

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 08:00am

Daleminton Hotel, room #204

Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Lucas was in a very so-and-so mood as he finished drying off from his bath this morning. Firstly, he'd gone to bed at around 03:00am as he had planned, only to wake up at around 06:40am to bad cramps in both legs at the very same time he urgently needed to use the toilet. That particular wake-up had not been pleasant in the least little bit. After getting back to his bed from the bathroom, he had taken a bottle of grape juice from the mini fridge then swallowed four different pills; clinical muscle relaxers, acetaminophen, ibuprofen and a Gravol to fight off acid reflux and nausea as well as help him back to sleep. He even had to apply a layer of hydrocortisone gel with a roll-on bottle so as to break the muscle spasm cycles and have a chance at sleeping again.

No such luck today.

As it tended to happen, the gel was effective for less than a quarter hour then the cramps were coming back, despite the bevvy of medications he had taken, leaving him with only one option. He painfully got out of bed and hobbled around with his cane, leaning on furniture and walls as he slowly moved about the suite to accomplish his necessities. He stopped by the bathroom to start the bath running then went to the kitchen to fetch a cold breakfast from the fridge in the form of muffins and brew his first coffee of the day, an overly sugared mochaccino that the wall inset machine was quite happy to provide in the extra large format of his thermal mug. Equipped with solid food and two large gulps of hot coffee sloshing in his gut, the boy made his slow trudge back to the bathroom and the filling tub. After setting his foods on the sliding wooden tray mounted to the tub, he looked over to the bed of embers in the fireplace. A few painful steps had him close enough to open the glass door to poke the reddish coals to life before adding some smaller logs from the stack. The hearth now fully a-burn with a cheery blaze, he closed the lights, satisfied that the more restive
lighting from the stove would help him see well enough while sparing his eyes from further cold electric whiteness until later in the day.

Taking off his ordinary boxers and T-shirt that had been his sleepwear, he sat on the tub's rim to test the water's warmth before closing the taps and sliding in slowly, extra careful to not slip and fall in as he sat himself and leaned backwards against the backrest portion of the tub. The result was immediate; the warm water helped calm down the spastic muscles greatly and alleviated the pain from his thighs to his toes in a soothing manner that no medication could ever match. Closing his eyes and letting himself slide down until the water reached his chin, the teenager mumbled contentedly in delight as he began to feel more human and less like a short-circuiting server main board. After almost a quarter hour spent in blessed silence and low light, he opened his eyes as squinted slits, just enough to spot his 'Precious' standing so lonely on the tray. Coffee called his name and he answered, taking a long pull of the sugary drink, grabbing a muffin at the same time. With a mouthful of sustenance, he decided to put himself some background noise but no visual as he wanted to avoid getting a lack-of-sleep migraine.

"Alexa" he called out, "Open the radio to the local CBC News Channel, volume at 15 decibels."

The domotics devices collaborated to fill the bathing alcove with the low voices of the news presenters as they discussed the morning traffic and weather. Everything was ordinary until 07:30am arrived. The program reran its top news storeys, which of course included the now confirmed social unrest and riotous climate in their southern neighbor. The USA were burning, slowly but surely, one state at a time, from ocean to ocean to ocean and nobody seemed able to stop it anymore. The litany of lone gunmen, militia attacks and church-led spontaneous 'inquisition' of supposed 'heretics' or suspected 'unpatriotic' traitors to Righteous Christian America just kept getting longer as the hours passed.

Completely disgusted with the situation, the teen told the domotics to switch over to play the relaxation series he had downloaded to the suite's server the evening he had arrived. Was it really three days ago already? Damn, time passed fast these days... When the clock chimed 07:45am he drained the tub and set out for his return trip to the bedroom, an exciting and perilous trip in his weakened condition.

Crud but he hated his legs!

Getting dressed in his clean brown ensemble that had been laundered by the hotel's laundry service yesterday, he swiftly put on every layer of clothing, strapping, sheaths, recorders and tools in order until he had his casual cut business jacket on and needed only his winter trenchcoat to be good for the road. Picking up the wired phone from the nightstand, he called up the front desk to make certain the shift manager was in the admin office to meet him for the 08:30am appointment.

{ SQ } - { This is not how business goes } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 11:20am)

(Western America; 08:20am)

With his coat on and the gloves, scarf and hat stuffed in the large side pockets, he marched out the door, locked it tightly, and aimed himself at the elevator. A short minute later, he was hobbling stiffly to the front desk to ask about his appointed meeting and was promptly ushered into the offices behind the large counter after taking his messages and the express courier envelope from the U-Haul company that contained the keys for his two rented garages.

Sitting himself to lessen the strain on his legs, the teenager just couldn't shake the feeling that this
meeting was going wrong before either of them had even spoken. The young white man with black hair, brown eyes and lips tightly pursed in sneering contempt that was supposedly the morning manager had looked upon him nastily the moment he set foot in the small enclosed space. This had increased as Lucas had simply sat himself in the visitors' chair without being invited, but since this was a shared office, not a private home, and he had an actually booked appointment, then getting permission to sit was not required. Plus, given the money he was dropping on the damned hotel by renting three suites for a month, you'd think the man would be more welcoming with his high level guest instead of ignoring the younger man by falsely concentrating on his computer and telephone to make himself look busy-busy-busy, thus pushing back the beginning of the conference right at his visitor's face.

Now Lucas wasn't born yesterday; he had lived through quite a few of these imbeciles and the little power plays they did to make themselves feel big and superior to him, trying desperately to find anything to justify to their minds that as adults, their age was more important than his competence, accomplishments and multiple companies. The menial low-level admin wasn't even a full time manager as was clearly spelled out on his name tag that read 'Daniel Lambert, daytime foreman' and that right there put Lucas in a bad mood. He had scheduled a meeting with a senior executive to complete his business, not the local cock-shaker who thought he was 'somebody' because he was related to one of the higher ups. The adolescent had very easily seen the bronze name plaque on the door before coming in that listed the five top managers and he didn't need his diplomas in medical sciences to know who 'Leland Lambert, afternoon manager' was in relation this low-born fool.

When it became painfully obvious to the 30 year old 'foreman' that Lucas was not now, and would never be, impressed by him or his important 'busy' business demeanor, he dropped the phone in its cradle to sit up straight and imperious in the thickly padded chair, trying to intimidate the boy by an amateurish display of flexing his biceps and deltoids to make his white button-down dress shirt tighten on his upper body to show off how athletic and manly he was. Making the little teenaged shithheads wet themselves in fear at how pumped he was had always been great pleasure to him since he turned 17 and went into amateur boxing. There was nothing like crushing boys under his fists to feel just how much more of a man than them he was and brighten his day. His small gang of back-alley arm-twisters he'd been running with since high school had similar views and backed him up if his chosen victim happened to have a few friends to defend him. With the menial little drug deals and low-amount illegal gambling they ran out of vacant rooms in the hotel, he really saw himself as one of the 'big bosses' in this area of Vancouver. In the 10 years he had worked here, nobody had ever challenged him for fear of what he could do to them or have daddy do in his name. Not that his father would ever know all that he did; the old guy had a weak heart and even weaker will. No backbone in that one, so he just wouldn't understand how his son had become a real 'mano' on his own name.

(Eastern America; 11:38am)

(Western America; 08:38am)

Lucas was not impressed in the least. He had outgrown lesser idiots of this inferior caliber when he was four years old, when he tried to kill that fucking Brit bastard that hurt his hands. This cockamamie imbecile had no idea of what cruel monster he was trying to dick around with.

The dull tool opened his mouth to spew bullshit at Lucas, thinking the boy would be an easy mark to smack-talk around and intimidate, just like all his other victims. "Ya know kid, t's not nice, or even very bright, to pass yourself off as yo' daddy when dealing with a company as big and powerful as the Daleminton Hotel? Ya'll come in here asking for meetings with high managers when you're a 'nobody' then ya drop yourself in my chair like ya're 'somebody' that deserves to sit his lazy punk ass when his betters are in the room? Who the fuck d'ya think y'are?" He barked at the kid while putting
in a touch of pseudo-street accent to make himself look tougher and meaner, like a biker who meant bad business.

Completely surprising the idiotic adult, the teen never answered him anything as he got up and out the door as quickly as his aching legs allowed, walking back to the reception desk to lay a complaint against the moron who thought he could hijack his meeting. He had already wasted ten minutes of useless wait, he wouldn't put off his schedule for worse since he had a reserved car coming to pick him up for 09:00am. The hotel administration could clear up its staffing issues on their own time, without making him waste his as they did the housecleaning. Said muscle-bound moron was scrambling from behind the desk to see what the juvenile he-whore would try to pull inside HIS hotel. And yes, the mongrel had that many dreams of delusion, even after being employed by Daleminton for a decade.

(Eastern America; 11:44am)

(Western America; 08:44am)

"Excuse me, miss?" Lucas asked politely, wearing the most non-aggressively urbane smile that he could produce while discretely removing the transparent vinyl cover from his hatchet-cane pommel, just in case. He could see the hormone powered lummox rushing to catch up to him from where he was, and bitter painful experience with muscle-bound oxen bull-rushing towards him meant this situation had a 95% chance of ending up in critical injuries for him. Better be prepared than taken unawares and hospitalized for additional broken limbs that he didn't have to spare.

Turning from the end of her phone call, the young receptionist smiled at what she knew to be the hotel's biggest client in her generation and she had no intent to lose her job. Especially not because the afternoon manager's son had decided to play at 'top-alpha dog-boss woof-woof' in the office with a client younger than himself yet again. If somehow this could blow-back in the criminalized thuggish moron's face, it would make the jobs of everybody in the hotel a whole lot simpler and easier to live.

(Eastern America; 11:45am)

(Western America; 08:45am)

"Yes sir, what can the Daleminton staff do for your comfort and pleasure today?" she asked with a genuine smile. At the end of her shift last evening, she had spoken with night manager Ohyun about how professional and well mannered this young man was, and he would be a good change from dealing with her boss's fucktard son who acted like a wannabee mafia 'gino' all day long. As if he had the balls to even lift a finger to make an effort at anything, let alone causing harm to anybody, the lazy cowardly bum!

"Yes, miss. I would like to know why it is that yesterday evening I scheduled a meeting with a 'senior manager' for 08:30am this morning, BUT this imbecilic retard is what greeted me on arrival? Is it the policy of the Daleminton complex to treat its high rollers like this? I want a real, active, senior executive to meet me to complete my extended reservations for two additional suites. Now. Please. Call the person in real charge of things. I don't want to threaten, but my contract with the hotel does have 'good business demeanor' and 'morally correct treatment' clauses just as all my other suppliers and clients are obliged to sign when doing affairs with my companies. Please remind whomever you call of this fact." The angry adolescent spoke in clear clipped words while trying to keep his temper under control. It wasn't the poor secretary's fault, and he would be damned if he acted like the lummox by blaming and insulting everyone in sight indiscriminately the way he seemed prone to do. Lucas had always prided himself on his good, polite, business comportment; this would not make him change that manner of acting with service personnel.
"Yes sir, I will call the General Manager, Misses Allegra Lucarno. She is in the building and will be with you shortly, since it was her that was supposed to take the meeting anyways." the receptionist answered with an even brighter smile. If they got lucky, this last complaint could be enough on its own to kick out the dumb loser for good. She hadn't even reached the telephone to call when the woman in question was seen to power-walk across the lobby towards them in a clear hurry to arrive from whatever problem she had been solving that kept her from being on time.

(Eastern America; 11:48am)

(Lucas leaned heavily on his cane as he observed the older woman coming towards them at flanking speed; she was tall at close to 6 feet, with wrinkled white skinned that was slightly colored without being actually tanned or bronzed, silvery hair and clear lucid green eyes that belied her age in the late sixties. She wore a very conservative but festive forest green business suit with a glaringly 'christmassy' neck scarf in red and gold tones that made everybody's eyes water at the sight. And no, the little tree ornament drawings on the damned thing did not make it any better to behold! Bloody holiday! Why did people dress like that, anyways?

The GM and the usurping DF reached Lucas at the same time. The male froze solid at the sight of just how servile, bordering on obsequious, the elder woman was towards the young dipshit that he had been about to put back in his proper place - on his knees worshiping his manhood - like all the fucking little street-strutters were supposed to be. What in Burning Hell could be so damned important about him that the wretched boy-bimbo got so much attention for anything other than being told how to service his boss's needs? As the daytime foreman was trying to think through the situation to understand why his daddy's boss was so decided to lick the little cunt's wetness off of him, the woman was having a quiet and discrete panic attack. They could not afford to lose this guy! His expenditures in the complex for the coming 30 days could make their entire holiday season all by himself! If he left the hotel in a fit of rage, the entire management staff could kiss their employment goodbye as the owners of the hotel would never let a blunder of this size pass without public reaction. She just hoped that she had managed to intervene before the idiotic buffoon Lambert had opened his mouth to show just how moronic and undesirable he was.

(Eastern America; 11:50am)

(Lucarno was trying to establish some sort of parity or friendly similarity between corporate people with her angry, despondent client. It had seemed to be working for a second there, until the ill-aborted runt Lambert opened his mouth to spew poison all over the kid's reputation and actually flat-out threaten him with physical harm in front of several witnesses and the hotel's security cameras.

"Doctor Wolenczak" the GM started with as much of a smile as she could in the circumstances, "What can our humble hotel do for you this fine morning? I do hope that the extra utilities in your suite are performing up to your standards? It was quite the rush to get everything set up on time for your arrival last Thursday. And I do apologize for not meeting you in person sooner, but the last Friday before Christmas is always a mess with a rush of new arrivals and the suppliers to boot... But being into customer services, you would have the same conditions at your companies, wouldn't you?"

Misses Lucarno was trying to establish some sort of parity or friendly similarity between corporate people with her angry, despondent client. It had seemed to be working for a second there, until the ill-aborted runt Lambert opened his mouth to spew poison all over the kid's reputation and actually flat-out threaten him with physical harm in front of several witnesses and the hotel's security cameras.

"What the Hells kinda bullshit is this kid trying to pull here? He ain't no doctor, boss! He's a cunt! Nut'tin but a stinking little teenaged alley-crawler that needs to be taught not to lie to adults! Move out of the way! I'll take him to the boilers downstairs and teach him a lesson 'bout lying to people in power like he's doing!" The angry man shouted out loudly enough to be heard across the entire
lobby. He was also starting to get scared underneath his bluster; he'd heard there were some kids that went to college at age 11 or 12 and got diplomas before they were 18, so it was a long-shot chance that this kid was one of those prodigies, but he doubted it. He really looked like just any other blond cock-sucker he'd beaten into submissiveness all through his younger years. Nothing on him said 'superior intelligence' or 'genius at work' so he felt pretty confident the kid was using his daddy or mommy's name to make himself look big and interesting to look at. Well, he'd teach him a lesson about that too!

(Eastern America; 11:56am)

(Western America; 08:56am)

"Actually, sir, I would be careful about insulting him. He really is a medical doctor with three different doctorates to his name, even though he's only 15 years old at this time." spoke an ordinary looking man dressed in an equally ordinary brown 2-piece suit with a horrendous 'christmassy' neck tie and pocket square to match. "My apologies for interrupting you, misses, doctor. Here is my card; Wallace Herringfjord, investigative reporter for the CNN Vancouver regional newsroom. I was wondering if I could have an appointment with you to discuss the events unfolding back home in the States, as well as what you believe would need to happen for you to change your plans to immigrate to Canada permanently. You have some rather vast holdings with Wolenbahn Electronics' successes with the World Bank, not to mention Wise Apothecary & Chemists having again raised its sales and profit ratios in 2020. I'm certain a lot of people in many levels of US government would like to know how to keep you in the country, and this would be your chance to let them know directly, without some diplomat or church cleric getting in the way to re-write or silence your words. Please take the time to think about it and email me an answer at your convenience. Merry Holidays, madam, doctor."

The reporter nodded politely then left but went to sit back by the right-hand fireplace where his piping hot coffee and croissant were waiting for his return. He discretely adjusted the small decorative pin on his ugly tie that hid a button camera with the recorder held in the inside pocket of his suit jacket. The large high quality microphone was hidden in the pocket square and could actually pick up what was being said twenty feet away without effort. The experienced field reporter had an instinct that something was going to happen and he wanted to capture the images for his channel's evening news broadcast.

(Eastern America; 12:01pm)

(Western America; 09:01am)

General Manager Lucarno was beyond incensed; this miserable incompetent bastard had threatened to kidnap, detain and beat a child, which was bad under any circumstances, but he had the boundless audacity to try doing so inside the hotel complex to boot! He was finished, and so was his father if the gormless old cad tried to keep her from firing his defective criminal son.

"My dear doctor Wolenczak, if you could wait in the management office, I will clear up this matter and be at your entire service momentarily. It will not take even five minutes to solve, I assure you." she tried to calm things down, desperate for a way out of a public confrontation.

Before Lucas could even reply, the angry, volatile, low-class criminal that served as foreman showed clearly that he had no understanding whatsoever of the situation or how bad it could still get. Stupidly going back to his method by default, he flexed his arms and thrust out his chest, trying to look intimidating and brutal so that the teenager would back down and let himself be dominated as should be the way of things. He would have to think about those companies and money the reporter talked about; if the kid was a real doctor, maybe he could make some drugs that could be sold by his
crew and make them a lot richer. If he had enough success with making the little dipshit produce drugs for him, he could then rent out his new chemist to the bigger guys in town and make money that way too.

"Don't bother with the kid, manager Lucarno! He's a kid! He's not important! Let me deal with him, I'll handle what he wants so you don't have to waste your time with childish shit anymore." he began to crack the fingers on both hands menacingly, joint by joint, trying to intimidate both his boss and the kid at the same time in an act of utter idiocy while completely ignoring the danger he was in. "Just go have tea with the owners in their office, why don't ya... I'll make the little twerp understand what happens to pig headed little cunts that think they can boss adults instead of obeying silently." he completed by smacking a closed fist in his open hand, attempting to look far more brutal and violent than he was actually capable of. The worse part of the incompetent's little show was that he didn't even seem to realize he was surrounded by many witnesses, several of them adult clients of the hotel upon which he would have no hold to keep them silent, or even out of the fight if things turned to an altercation.

(Eastern America; 12:08pm)
(Western America; 09:08am)

Lucas discreetly set his cane against the reception desk so it stood ready then loosed a small knife from his right wrist bracer and an acid capsule from the left wrist bracer, his movements hidden by the long sleeves of his trench coat. The brute saw nothing of this since the man's attention was towards his angry boss, whom he was simultaneously pleading and bullying in a transparent attempt to get her out of his way, so he could attack the slim sickly teenager to his heart's content. Everything came to a terribly quick end, just mere moments after Lucas had loosened his weapons to react to the imminent threat.

(Eastern America; 12:09pm)
(Western America; 09:09am)

"You're fired!" screamed the general manager at the criminal male. "You have been a problem in this hotel's management staff for years and now it is enough! You will most certainly NOT be doing anything violent or uncivilized towards our young doctor here!" she continued shouting at the top of her lungs. "Allie! Call the police! If doctor Wolenczak wants to lay a complaint against this boor, we will be helping him!" she ordered the receptionist who moved to comply quickly.

(Eastern America; 12:10pm)
(Western America; 09:10am)

Seeing his entire career, life and criminal aspirations collapsing around him, and quite publicly too, the cowardly wannabe abandoned attempts to talk with his boss, deciding to get physical with the little cum stain that caused all this to happen, all the while conveniently forgetting it was his own stupidity that started the whole conflagration. Subtlety not being his best virtue, and since it was a well known reality in his limited world that teenagers answered faster to strength and pain, he simply bull-rushed towards the kid, shoving the elderly woman out of his way and to the hard cement floor as he ran at the unsteady boy, gearing up to lay a good firm beating on his pasty hide.

That bad decision would end his life.

(Eastern America; 12:11pm)
The brutal deluded male reached the boy fast enough to grab the clothes on his chest to yank him close and firmly hold him in place as he rammed his cocked right fist into the kid's jaw and neck, finally pounding some obedience and fear into him when his abdomen exploded in pain of his own. Both injured males staggered backwards, looking down to see Lucas pull back his right arm, holding a bloodied 3 inch long blade that the adolescent had just sank all the way to the hilt inside his attacker's guts on what was Lucas' left side without any remorse, before giving it a vicious twist & sideways motion towards his right to enlarge the wound as much as possible.

Lucas had disemboweled his attacker in one planned but very lucky strike.

Trying desperately to hold his blood and viscera inside his opened abdominal cavity with both shaking hands, the brutal degenerate realized he was crying for the first time in almost 14 years. As he wavered on his weak legs, trying to comprehend just how it had all gone so wrong so fast, he fell to both knees, sobbing his last breaths uncontrollably as his white shirt and trousers turned rust red by absorbing so much blood while the rest fell to the floor, creating a matching stain on the beige carpet. Looking up to the boy he had wanted to beat and dominate for his own enjoyment, he no longer saw a human child; he only saw the monstrous beast hidden under the thin milky white skin. Only an unnatural creature could refuse to be afraid of a strong mighty adult man like himself. No normal human child would ever be unafraid of an adult's great strength and authority.

As he died from catastrophic exsanguination, the 30 year old male 'made man' wannabe lost all contact with material reality even more than before, abandoning himself to his delusions of power, strength and the breaking of boys under his cruel authoritative fists. He didn't even close his eyes as he choked on bloodied bile that came out of his mouth to stain his chin, spasming once as he careened sideways to the right, falling to the blood stained carpet never to rise again.

Lucas for his part had fallen against the reception counter then slid down to the floor as soon as the criminal's fist had connected with his jaw and side of his neck, making him choke in spastic erratic breaths for several panicked seconds. It took him a minute after the man was lying dead on the floor to become steady enough to climb back to his feet and lean on the counter. About six feet to the left side of him, a generous client was helping the elderly manager get into one of the thickly padded benches that were placed for the convenience of visitors waiting their turn to be served by the receptionists when there was a large crowd. The woman looked badly shaken by events but not actually injured, unlike Lucas who still had troubles breathing properly through his swelling trachea.

Taking a few short steps away from the crowd gathering around the crime scene, the adolescent deposited the bloody knife on the counter before he took the time to replace the acid capsule back in its bracer. He leaned on the reception desk with his right hand, the left hand holding his cane tightly so he had two points of stability to hold himself upright in the face of adversity. At this point, it just wouldn't do to look weak, or unable to defend himself, in the eyes of those trying to take advantage
of the civil unrest to come at him for a surreptitious attack under the radars.

(Eastern America; 12:15pm)

(Western America; 09:15am)

A young man, white skinned with brown hair and blue eyes, dressed in a black 3-piece suit with gray trench coat and matching gray cap came close to Lucas, stopping about five feet away to ask in fearful tone: "I have your limousine ready in the front parking, doctor Wolenczak. Will you be needing it, now, or will you cancel the reservation?"

Everybody looked at the driver with large disbelieving eyes while Lucas just closed his, trying to think of what he could do to avoid the headache the police and lawyers would cause him today. Ah, well! He had his body camera recordings and the GM had fired the bozo mere seconds before he went postal on them, so he should be in the clear. Besides, finding a history of criminal acts and debauchery against a low-life like that should be easy enough to qualify as routine grunt work compared to what he normally dealt with. Taking his cellphone out of his flannel shirt pocket, he called his legal team's criminalist to advise him he was needed at the hotel soon; Mr. Aylmer would deal with the cops and their papers easily enough. Lucas was paying out enough for the service, he'd better get free of this mess by lunch or else he would have to ask truly uncomfortable questions about the law firm's efficiency.

{ SQ } - { Terrifying teenaged terror } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 12:25pm)

(Western America; 09:25am)

Lucas Andrew Wise Holtzenstein Wolenczak, doctor of medicine, pharmacology and psychiatry, was most certainly not in a good mood anymore, he could confirm this to you. R-F-N he would! Who the bloody Everburning Hells hires that kind of unstable, bullyish, low-browed, low-jawed, knuckle dragging attempt at sapience?

He wasn't talking about the guy he had disemboweled; that was done and passed.

No. The cause for his doing one of those famous 'angsty teenager mood swings' was standing three feet in front of him with a black uniform, a cap, handcuffs in his left hand and a pistol in the right hand pointed right at the boy's face.

The idiotic municipal cop had arrived five minutes ago, at the same time as the ambulance, and automatically assumed that since he was a kid, a foreigner and, most damningly, still alive, then – obviously – Lucas was the culprit who caused the whole episode. The menial little imbecile, some white twink not even thirty years old yet, seemed determined to show publicly that he had a gun and wasn't afraid to use it, regardless of witnesses or the truth. Even when manager Lucarno and the young woman from the reception desk tried to tell him what happened, the policeman just waved them aside, telling them aloud that "Hysteric women aren't credible witnesses anyways, so I won't waste my time on you. Calm down, the crown's attorney will contact you later, if there's an actual need." His sneer of misogynistic contempt wasn't even hidden as he told them to go take a hike.

Thankfully, Lucas had managed to call his both his law firm in Vancouver and the Wise Apothecary security division in Buffalo before the dumb-ass came in, threatening to shoot him if he tried anything with his cellphone or cane. The trigger happy 'capo' had even tried to tell the paramedics to not look at the clearly injured boy on account that "It's only what he deserved for killing that good man. He's no victim, stop wasting my time and go away! I have a perp to book downtown!"
To the cop’s anger, and fear it seemed, the two paramedics did no such thing, especially when the hotel manager identified herself and, despite the threats from the cop, told the ambulance crew what had happened in the lobby before they arrived. When the cop tried again to scream and intimidate people into shutting up and letting him grab Lucas to bring him to the station, the hotel’s own security people moved in to support their manager. That was when the little dipshit drew his gun and started waving it around like he didn’t really know what he was doing.

Now, Lucas was 15 years old kid but an unusually very stable, pragmatic one. Under normal everyday circumstances. What did it say about his mindset, that he was more afraid of how his business reputation with the hotel would get impacted by this, than worried about the gun aimed at his nose?

Having already killed once this morning in semi-controlled context as the minion had absolutely no chance against the enemy he faced, Lucas was not displeased by the results nor was he worried by the superficial injuries he had incurred. Since he had bad cramps in his legs since he woke up at dawn, he had taken several pain relievers and muscle relaxers which meant that he was already operating under clinical medications, some of which had actually made him more tolerant to blunt force since they served to deflate trauma or cramps in affected muscles. In other words, he would bruise and be woozy for a while but no much more, and the ecchymosis would be limited to about 2/3 of what it should have become.

No, Lucas was not put off by either the death, the injuries or the witnesses. Those were just the cost of business in North America in this day and age. At least, his childhood, the parents he had and the events of his youth to date all took him to that conclusion, no matter what other data he might have read about sociology and law. Since this was probably the 11th human that he killed with his own hands but closer to number 88 in all the deaths he was responsible for, the teen barely gave the corpse any attention anymore. The carrion wasn’t his problem, the forensics crew would load him up eventually then the hotel maintenance staff would clean the stains. The real problem was the armed dimwit goon that was spouting off nonsense at all comers, including the actual victims of the crime.

Giving a disdainful sniff, the boy squinted his blue eyes at the cop, a deeply buried instinct at the back of his mind was niggling him, sending discrete warnings to his fight-or-flight reflexes. His combat experience was telling him that he wasn’t done fighting yet, but also that he was outmatched by the enemy he was facing. Closing his eyes for a few seconds as the paramedic insisted on kneeling in front of him to hold his skull to palpate his jaw, throat and neck, the teen's formidable mind tried to reboot and process the scene from a 'procedural' perspective rather than the 'warfare' mode it was in. Going back two years into his own experiences with a police intervention during the period of the attempted rape then days later at the hotel where his father attacked him, Lucas quickly found the missing or different items that were 'pinging' on his defensive instincts. Taking advantage of the fact the paramedic was blocking the line of direct sight and the cop was turned sideways at 20-odd degrees to scream at poor old madam Lucarno again, the boy discretely moved his fingers inside the long sleeves of his trench coat to loosen and grip a neuro-toxin capsule in the left hand and an acid capsule in the right.

As the paramedic stood up, it forced the self-styled 'cop' to back away a few feet and stop his shouting match with the hotel admin for precious seconds. As the lobby became mostly silent, Lucas shouted as loud as he could "Hey, FAKE cop! When are you going to call for back-up units or tell your boss at the station that he has a dead body to come for? Shouldn't there be another pair of cruisers here by now, if you followed the real procedures? Shouldn't there be another four cops here, by now? And come to think of it, isn't it official police procedures to have TWO officers per car at all times, so that if one goes down, the other calls it in for help? So, FAKER, What's the real deal, here? What do you really want with me? Who sent you? Where were you gonna take me?"
The two paramedics immediately exchanged worried glances as the last 15 minutes of the situation played back before their eyes and they realized that, yes, the cop was alone, and no, he hadn't called in any requests for back-up or to report the cadaver. The two burly adult males stood straighter and purposefully put themselves between the teenager and the now suspect policeman. Giving the young male a thorough once-over, they couldn't find any faults with his uniform, gear or ID badge. The only thing to suggest there was foul play was the complete absence of other cops, especially here in a high class hotel like this.

And his comms... The unit he wore was inert. Not activated at all. Ah, Shit!

The paramedic on the left discretely and softly clicked active the cellphone he had hidden behind his back as he moved to shield Lucas, connecting it to the 9-1-1 dispatcher who would receive this as an Ultra-Emergency from an EMT on the job who could not use regular comms or public channels to talk. It would also force the dispatcher to review all previous calls for the hotel and also ask the police cars in the area if they had gotten any requests for intervention or back-up. If this guy was a real cop, then the talkie on his shoulder would get beeped and he would have to answer or else the central police controllers would send in a SWAT team under the presumption there was an officer down in need of saving.

With his phone vibrating silently in his hand to confirm the EMT's virtual lifeline was open with the 9-1-1 switchboard, the paramedic asked aloud "Yeah, hey, officer Durand... Aren't you going to call in your partner to support you against this supposedly dangerous kid? Aren't you going to call more cars and the forensics truck to pick up the body? Or better yet man! Why don't you start by activating your damned talkie on your uniform to tell the dispatcher what kindsa shits you been up to!"

Making a face of fear, the young cop backed off to keep the mass of people all in his sights as he began to realize he was in fact alone against almost forty people on the main floor of the lobby and another dozen on the mezzanine. His eyes became wide with raw fear when he looked up to the balcony banister to see that several young adults in their early twenties had cellphones in hand, all aimed at the scene to film it and at least two were busy zooming in on his face in particular. In a fit of uncontrolled, panic-fueled rage, the policeman raised his right hand at the balcony to aim his pistol at the crowd of vacationing students, shouting threats at them, along with orders to throw their phones down to the floor so they could be confiscated. He even threatened to have them arrested for interference in an investigation if they didn't obey as he waved his gun around randomly.

Lucas, well protected behind two beefy paramedics, shouted out loud "Oh yeah? You and what army's gonna arrest them, loser? After all, you still haven't called back-up or your station chief! Do you really think anybody in this hotel believes you anymore, fucktard?" he jeered with as much contempt and sarcasm as he could pour into his screams. At the same time, he dropped to the floor and leaned sideways to have his head and chest covered more by the ambulance crewman in front of him, thus making him disappear partially.

The effect was instantaneous; when he realized he could no longer see his victim clearly, the cop screamed in outrage and lifted the gun up to shoot a pair of warning shots into the ceiling, thus scaring the crowd into submission. Or so he thought. As he began to scream obscenities and threats to bring back his prisoner at the room at large, Lucas made his tactical move. Leaning backwards from a partially sitting position on the carpeted floor, the teen took the neuro-toxin in his right hand then reared the right arm back for an overhead throw. He flipped active the 5 second timer then lobbed the minuscule device over the crowd in a curved trajectory that was about 20 feet high inside the 30 foot tall cathedral-style vault of the lobby's timber framed, gabled roof. As the capsule was back down at 9 feet high, it detonated, clouding a zone 10 feet wide around it in fine colorless, odorless, poison mist that had visible effects barely 4 seconds after it touched skin or entered the
mucous membranes.

The 'supposed' cop was now in the throes of a fully panicked, out of control, fit of rage and fear, which was exponentialized when some fucking little turdcake threw out a damned firecracker of some sorts over his head. He sidestepped quickly enough that the little metallic thing dropped to the floor instead of his head but hadn't seen who did it. Screaming even worse than before, he took another warning shot, this time right above the heads of the people on the mezzanine, or rather, at the level of their shoulders, forcing them to scramble madly out of his firing line, making a few fall to the balcony's carpeted floor in the rush to escape. He tried to scream more obscenities, to threaten them if he didn't get his prisoner back, but his voice wasn't cooperating anymore and he suddenly couldn't move or control his body.

The false policeman fell to the floor in an undignified heap, silent and still quite conscious but utterly unable to stop the teenager he had been hunting from coming by the side of his prone form to pick up his pistol and remove his tool belt. Then the boy tried to use the police comms unit to call in real police cars and back-up officers, at which point everybody was shown the unit had neither batteries nor circuits in it; it was an empty dud, just like the fake officer had been.

The paramedics became busy with laying the faker on his back with his hands tied over his belly with his own handcuffs while the sirens of REAL police cars coming to the scene could be heard in the distance, announcing the arrival of reinforcements. Lucas leaned on his cane with his left hand, the criminal's pistol tightly clenched in his right hand. Just in case, ya know...?

Poor manager Lucarno was sitting down again, leaning forward with her head in her hands. What would her best paying customer to ever come to Daleminton think of their town, now? She was depressing preemptively at the thought of his packing up and leaving in a snit.

Looking at the mess and carnage, the young driver from the limousine company decided to call his dispatcher and talk to his boss about the kinda day he was gonna have. And he wanted a pay raise and some danger premium too. The client was okay, he told his supervisor, but the people around him were friggin' nutcakes and no nobody was paid 'nuff to deal with this shite.

Burning days in L.A.

(MacGyver 1985 – opening theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 19:24pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 12:24pm (noon)

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 09:24am

Phoenix Foundation HQ; conference room

Los Angeles, California, USA

MacGyver passed a weary hand through his medium length blond hair, giving his scalp a vigorous scratch at the same time, trying to shake the feeling of 'impending doom' that was dogging the back of his mind since they arrived back in Los Angeles just before dawn. The measly 2 hours of restless sleep in the jet plane during the flight had not been pleasant for anybody involved.

First, they had to brave San Francisco's traffic in the middle of the flippin' night at passed 23:30pm right at the time the cinemas end the evening movies but before the late presentations that start at 24:00am so that put a lot of cars all going in circles around the same places. And they were in the damned Stanford Campus area of Silicon Valley to boot, so the constant press of students moving
around the bars and restaurants for their Friday & Christmas parties with school buddies before heading back home for 3 weeks choked the streets for miles all around the motel they had lodged at.

It had taken two damnable hours in congested streets to reach the fences of the private cargo airport where the large DXS airplane was parked. The permanent crew of two always stayed aboard since they had all the facilities for it and they had used the hours since the call to prepare for the short flight back. Or at least, it had been foreseen as short; the national guard had other ideas. With the emergence of civil unrest and mass rioting on the east coast already breaking out as the sun was coming up and people got the news broadcast updates from the Friday before, hundreds devolved into mental breakdowns that led to violence, arson and murder. Their flight was delayed for several more hours until they got clearances from both the civilian air traffic tower in San-Fran and the US Airspace National Defense Coordination Center.

At least they were waiting in style, not sitting on the tarmac in the cold December air. The old thing was a McDonnell-Douglas MD-11 Combi built in 1991 for Alitalia under a rental contract, then was returned per the lease terms in 2009 when Alitalia closed down that division. McDonnell-Douglas tried to sell the five planes but hadn’t managed to find a buyer until the US Department of External Services came along in 2012 with a low-ball offer for all five jets together, bundled with a contract to convert and reinforce the airliners to some very specific demands. The entire airframe was adapted to the new insides, rebuilt to military specifications with an eye on prolonged overseas missions during which renting rooms at a hotel was not possible and having high tech gear in the open would be seen as an act of aggression by the locals.

The 175 feet long, wide-body transoceanic jets were hybrids built to carry both passengers & heavy cargo on the main deck with regular freight pods in the dedicated cargo hold beneath the main floor. This original layout had the principal cargo compartment taking up the rear third of the main deck with the freight door on the left side with an interior bulkhead to safely separate the 200 passenger seats from the materials. The most drastic renovation included deconstructing the left side cargo door by rebuilding the fuselage while cutting the tail's underside to place a hydraulic cargo on-ramp capable of passing palletized freight or small vehicles like jeeps, tractors, forklifts and such to help in the offloading of the other cargo when landing in rough conditions. The main deck cargo hold still took one third of the floor when the rebuild was done.

From the hold's armored safety bulkhead going forward, the new plans were very much crew welfare oriented in the mindset that healthy, well lodged crew would perform better for longer missions regardless of how rough the environment and job were.

Mini infirmary with 2 mobile gurneys, 4 medical bunks, locking medical closets, wall inset banks of dialysis & defibrillator machinery at 6 emplacements, ceiling-track hung medical sensors, dedicated wet-bath stall with folding steel wash plate to hold an unconscious adult for cleaning before surgery.

Sleeping compartment holding 12 individually enclosed bunks stacked 2 high with drawers under each bed, foot locker and paired standing closets.

Communal washroom with 6 wet-bath stalls, 4 stacked washer/dryer combos, a janitor's sink & wheeled mop bucket under, the trash compactor and recycling shredder.

Galley kitchen with industrial fridges & freezers, 2 large ovens, 2 microwave ovens, gas grill with 8 hobs, professional drinks brewer, 4 dry storage closets.

All-purposes hall with 5 clusters (1 table, 4 swivel chairs, 1 monitor).

Enclosed SCIF (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) for electronic & cybernetic warfare, communications, airframe sensors and regional oversight.
Extended glass cockpit with 4 seats and consoles.

With that kind of 'luxurious' setup compared to Mac's EOD missions in the Middle-East, the small 4 person team had been able to roll their van right into the plane's cargo hold and stash their gear directly into their personal bunks and storage without having to haggle and gripe like four siblings on vacation the way they usually ended up doing when choosing motel rooms or camping in tents. Although, with Mac and Bozer having known each other so long, and already being roommates at home, it pretty much left Jack to room with Riley or whomever was assigned as their fourth by default.

Once they were aboard and stowed, the teammates had been greeted in the APH by their two despondent flight crew's news about the USANDC imposing delays for inspection of flight plans and airplane manifests, with priority given to flights from the national guard, coast guard, US Air Force, diplomats, med-evac, and finally a bevvy of policing and intelligence agencies that included DXS before passing all the regularly scheduled passenger and cargo flights. There had been an estimated 5 to 6 hours of wait before the airspace around their zone was cleared enough at the moment they had called for the take-off procedures 2 hours previously, so another 3 or 4 hours stuck on tarmac ahead of them. Because they were still wired from the hard video conference with Matty and the declaration of the 'Noah's Ark' protocol, the 4 friends sat together to eat a snack while the pilots had a nap in their bunks until they were called on. The mission team had little to do but watch the news on the TV sets installed at each table. What they saw was just the preludes and already it looked like an idiot had run around the entire USA with a drum of liquid opium, throwing the stuff in people's faces to render them completely stoned out of their wits.

When the USANDC called them at 04:11am to confirm they had their flight plans authorized and were slotted a take-off time for 05:00am, the entire mission team was ready to lay down for a quick nap. The pilots got them off the runway and airborne in the allotted time, then back in LA as fast as the old MD-11C-mod could fly. They had arrived at the worst of morning rush hour, even on Saturday. It was afterall the last weekend before Christmas, thusly people were entering the 'panic shopping' period that always happened each year. Damned but it had been a frekkin' mess! Los Angeles traffic at 08:00am is barely passable in normal days, but this time it was clear that they would never make it home to secure their places, no matter what Matty had so strongly suggested. If they tried, they would probably get stuck over there and not come back to Phoenix anytime soon, so they went straight to the Foundation instead. If time and events allowed for it, they would secure their homes later in the day.

And so, here they were, in their usual conference room at work, the building shuttered with armed guards on the rooftops and balconies of the executive offices on the tenth floor. The underground parking lot had been enclosed with several mobile armored metal gun-posts having been placed all around the on-ramps and personnel accesses. Getting subjected to car and body searches to get into the building had been the last straw. All four were in piss-poor mood and yet, here they were, in the remote-ops management salon, waiting (AGAIN!) for Matty to come online for an update to their orders. In the meanwhile, they were watching four different news channels from all over the country and regretting it more with each minute that passed.

{ SQ } - { Hometown disadvantages } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 12:24pm)

(Western America; 09:24am)

At 09:24am, the system beeped to warn of an incoming line for them. Riley, looking tired and depressed, typed a few keys on the room's console quickly to accept the signal on the main view-
screen, switching the image from the news channels to an equally worn out Mathilda Webber who was located in a small enclosed communications cabin lined in cheap gray felt and nothing else.

"Okay people. First off, let me say that I'm glad to see you all in one piece, and yes Jack, even you too; several thousand others can't say the same as we speak. Now, I am aware that none of you had time to go home and fortify your preps, you will do that during the rest of today and have as good a night of sleep as you can manage before assembling directly at the airport tomorrow at 11:00am for muster. Then, you'll fly out in the MD-11C mod to Vancouver tomorrow afternoon, leaving the airport at 13:00pm to reach Vancouver International Airport on Sea Island in the city's central sectors at 16:30pm. From there, it will take you about 2 hours by car in the early evening traffic to reach the Daleminton Hotel complex in North Vancouver. For this, you will be getting a long Chevy mini-bus that seats 12 people plus 1 wheelchair/gurney that was adapted specifically for protective transport of principal assets with health problems. The US consulate in Vancouver will have a pair of rented unmodified SUV's waiting on the tarmac at your assigned hangar when the plane taxis in to park. Any questions to date?"

The four teammates were relieved to have some time home to fix things before hitting the road again, even if traveling by private jet was a lot more comfortable than public airlines. Their plane was massive and absolutely needed a commercial grade runway to move so it did have its own drawbacks, but mostly for the planners and flight crew; they just sat in the ride, waiting for it to reach destination. That meant they had absolutely no choice but to wait for the governments of both countries to clear them a flight plan with a heavy-carriage capable runway at each end of the voyage, otherwise they had to find alternate transportation. In December, in North America, with snow storms and gusting winds, that could take days or even a full week to get there by ground, and nobody was talking about using an oceanic boat to get up to Canada.

"Okay then." Matty said. "The 4-men team from NCIS will meet you directly at the airfield hangar and board with you. They are having troubles with an epidemic of sailors abandoning their posts to join fascist militias, sometimes stealing weapons or restricted technology as they go AWOL. It means that they got stalled and can't leave today, even if you were ready to leave right away. And we need them to go with you at the same time; it's their people that will handle the legal & bureaucratic wrangling while you concentrate on the protective perimeter and ECW. Honestly though, you couldn't have left even if you were already in the plane waiting for clearance. The USANDC has taken over the entirety of the air traffic control systems in all public, private and military airports across all US territories until the situation returns to peaceful societal conditions. All flight plans are evaluated according to 'Noah's Ark' protocol standards and that means that our bird is low on the totem pole. On top of that, several zones are being declared 'no fly / no land' danger areas that can be accessed only by national guard helicopters or coast guard rescue teams, with civilian flights being restrained more and more every hour. I was confirmed by the DIA that the end plan is to permanently clear out at least 60% of all flying vehicles out of the air by Sunday's dinner time."

The conference salon door opened to let in Jill Morgan, a forensic technician that also served as their permanent home-base comms manager when Riley was on the road with them. She had been in the central overwatch SCIF higher inside the building, doing active surveillance on several hundred principal assets that could need assistance or exfiltration, including the young genius that had been the unwitting cause of all this kerfuffle.

"I apologize for disturbing you, director Webber, but we have news from Vancouver. Doctor Wolenczak has just been assaulted by an employee of the Daleminton Hotel which he has killed in return. Municipal police are on the scene, the RCMP are on the way with people from CSIS, that's the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the US Secret Service offices in Vancouver have dispatched a 2-man team to do a preliminary interview in order to see what happened and how it affects the rest of the process from now on. Since the events happened around 09:00am, we just saw
it and I came to warn you all. Can I do anything else for the team?"

Everybody sighed at the same time; this day just wasn't gonna get any better.

{ SQ } - { The streets are burning } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 13:31pm)

(Western America; 10:31am)

Riley was forced to stay two extra hours to teach the home-base techs how to un-hack their gear and Jack wanted to be her escort home to help her scare off the rougher elements in her neighborhood while she shuttered her apartment for several weeks of absence. After that, she would go with Jack to his own apartment to help him with his own preparations and lockdown, after that she would spend the night with him and bunk in his spare bedroom so they could drive to the airport together in a single car. Therefore Angus and Wilt were already on the streets, in Mac's car, with the black skinned male driving them through a peripheral road towards home, as they had shared three days ago when they came to work.

Since Bozer had been told about the Phoenix Foundation's real work, they had gotten to fit their schedules and share more activities and items as time went by. Firstly, they had been housemates for years since Mac owned the house outright as it had been a legacy from his grand-father and he let Bozer live there for less than half a rent. They often shared or switched cars if one was in the shop or not big enough for the errands being done, and they shared the chores and housework pretty much equally as they were both very manual guys. Now, they made an effort to match their work hours and vacation days, participate in the same R & D projects and serve as each other's assistant during the final presentation of their work results to the Foundation's Budgeting & Validation Committee.

As it was, it had become a habit for them to take just one car to and back from work, especially on days when they were already aware they were leaving the country. This sharing lowered mileage and wearing out on each car, as well as making the daily commutes more friendly and tolerable than getting stuck alone in a hot metal box in traffic with nothing but the radio and one's own thoughts for company. As the two close friends rolled through a more residential district of Los Angeles, Bozer stepped a bit on the gas pedal to increase speed as they both saw the signs of ongoing violence in damaged cars, vandalized house facades and...

A burning tree?

A bloody south-California palm tree was burning on somebody's front yard with weird undefined objects dangling from the branches, just as blazing as the leaves and limbs, while a group of middle aged white men were arrayed in a circle around it, their right arms raised in the Nazi salute while the only woman, white as well, was throwing books and magazines into a pile of shrubbery, furniture, cushions and trash at the foot of the tree that had served as pyre to ignite the towering vegetal.

MacGyver gave Bozer a backhanded smack on his elbow, followed by a hand sign that saw his friend react as if they were on a mission in foreign soil under hostile pursuit; he stepped on the pedal to take them out of the area at the fastest 'safe' speed he could use.

The group of white power apostles looked up to see the unknown car rev its engine to double its speed up to highway velocity for the quickest escape possible out of the neighborhood. As the vehicle passed, the worshipers saw the bi-racial crew in the car and ran to get in the street behind the rushing car. Two of the men pulled out pistols and took potshots towards them, luckily they only hit their trunk or parked cars as Bozer undertook a zigzag pattern to make them a more difficult target to aim at, then turned to a side street at the first intersection he saw to get out of firing sight ASAP.
After five minutes of random, high speed meandering around the neighborhood with more damaged cars and houses all over, they stopped right in the middle of the street at a '+' intersection to look over at the online road maps to find their way back on track. Wilt took out his Sig Sauer 9mm service pistol as he looked all over at the inert vehicles and vandalized properties that surrounded them while Angus used his phone to locate their position to navigate a way back home. Without any visible threats, Wilt turned on the car's radio set, using the DIY mods his friend had inflicted on the poor device to convert it into a full-spectrum receiver to capt emergency services dispatch frequencies and short-wave or CB broadcasts as well. Using his left hand was uneasy, but there was no ways he would let go of his pistol in these circumstances.

"Yo, Mac! Why did you make me step on it when you did? Not that I'm against it or anything, but what tipped you off they were crazies about to shoot at us wildly?" the young man asked his high school friend, honestly perplexed as to what bizarre clue the blond wunderkind had seen that made him react so fast.

Gritting his teeth in frustration and raw gut-churning fear, Angus wiped the sweat of his forehead with a shaky right hand, blinking clouded green eyes as he tried to concentrate on the small screen in his left hand. Once he had found their location, he needed only 20 seconds to find them a new travel path out of this God-forsaken place so they could reach home and bunker down fast. Holding the phone out so Bozer could memorize the roadways he showed him was faster than speaking. As soon as the car was rolling again though, Mac resolutely looked out of his side window, trying his best to avoid looking left towards his friend who was focusing on driving them to the much desired safety.

(Eastern America; 14:09pm)

(Western America; 11:09am)

It was only 30 minutes later, with only the sounds of the intercepted LA 9-1-1 dispatch as background noise filling the car, that the pair reached their own upscale residential sector and slowed down back to normal homecoming speed. It was only when they were parked safely inside the enclosed 4-space garage with the door rolled down and locked behind them, that Bozer took the time to really look at his friend fully. Mac was resolutely looking right, out of his window, to the garage wall as if his life depended on it, but his hands were closed into tight shaking fists, and his jaw clenched so hard the muscles along the mandible were bulging, both telling a story of great stress that he couldn't yet release himself from.

"Come on, bro... What happened? I heard the radio dispatches the same as you... There's fire and riots around town and a lot of sectors aren't safe anymore. But what's got into you? You're tighter than Jack when Matty says 'she has a solo mission for him in Siberia' if he tries to get cute with her..."

Swallowing passed a hard lump in his throat, Mac turned to his friend, showing him the tears flowing down his face as he shivered in shock at what he had seen in his own home country, America, not in some primitive fascistic 'banana republic' in Africa or South America's drug cartel regions. Trying desperately to stanch the constant river of salty water leaking out of his eyes with the heels of both hands, the emotional 27 year old couldn't manage to stop the full-bodied shakes that wracked him all of a sudden. Bozer dropper his pistol in the handbrake lever console between the seats so he could undo his seat-belt to offer support and comfort to his severely distressed brother. He placed his left hand over Mac's chest on his heart and his right hand over the nape of his neck, squeezing gently to lend some human warmth and stability.

After over ten minutes of harsh, choking sobs with his eyes screwed tightly shut against the cruel world he no longer wanted to see, Angus finally settled down enough to calm his breathing and un-
clench his fists to reveal bloody little crescent moon shapes in his palms where the fingernails had
dug into the flesh. Acting on instinct and years of friendship, he raised his arms to wrap both hands
over Wilt's, over his heart, to old onto what little decent humanity he could still feel around himself.
Finally opening his teary eyes to look at his friend's stressed, worried features, the so-called 'genius
of survival improvisation' was completely incapable of explaining what he saw.

America was a 'free country' and California was a bastion of left-leaning liberal modernism; why in
tarnation did this happen here, in this era?

Trying to speak passed the recurring full body shakes of shock and the mental anguish he felt, Angus
tried to articulate a basic description of what he had seen that made him give Wilt the emergency 'get
out of here RFN' code-tap on the arm. Wiping away at his undone, sobbed out features again,
MacGyver whispered harshly in croaking tones that Bozer had to lean in closer to hear the words.

"They killed them." Mac exhaled, "They slaughtered them and dropped them in the pile of wrecked
furniture, clothes, books and trash to burn the bodies beyond identification. It's always been part of
their ritual, you know, to burn the dead to keep police from identifying the bodies or family from
having confirmation of what happened. It always gave the killers protection, to burn the proof, and
made them feel powerful to circle around the fire, to hail themselves as great big heroes of the cult of
monsters they worship..."

Bozer clenched his hands into fists in the front and collar of his brother's red checkered flannel shirt,
imagining the answer but needing to hear the actual words, to know for real what the other male had
seen that put him in such a state. "Who did they kill Mac? Who did you see in the burning pile?"

Looking out in empty space next to Bozer's left ear, MacGyver spoke out hoarsely "Kids, Bose, little
kids barely 8 or 10 years old, 3 of them, tied at the base of the tree with the stuff dumped all over
them and torched. I can guarantee you they were african-american kids, Bose, I can swear it on my
life and be ashamed of it for all my days to come..." he said as tears flowed down his cheeks anew.

"How can you be so sure? They could have been little white folk they thought were heretics, kinda
their own version of 'Matty the Hun', you know... Why can you swear so hard they were black, or
even kids or Hells, Mac... Even anything human in that pile of blazing stuff?"

Closing his eyes again, MacGyver shook his head in despair at the Times of Turmoil that were
hitting them full-on. He forced himself to take in deeper, slower breaths to stabilize himself out of his
shocked state to become coherent again. Now was no longer the time to panic anymore. "I can swear
they were kids and black Bozer cuz I saw the sizes and shapes of the skulls through the burning
wreckage. I can guarantee they were black cuz the group of cultists around the fire were all making
Nazi salutes at the flames and all had a large KKKK 'Blood Drop' emblem on the chest of the white
T-shirts they wore. And I saw the flaming remains of two adults lynched and hung by their ankles in
the top of the palm tree, hidden by the mass of blazing foliage and branches. Given there was a
vandalized, shot-out SUV smeared with blood stains in the house's driveway and the garage door
was wide open... Statistically, given the composition of the neighborhood, the history of racial
violence in the USA and the KKK symbols, salutes and shooting at a black man the moment they
see him... Yeah, I can swear to you it was a black family with 3 little ones that got lynched, murdered
and burned at the stake right in the middle of our town. Just like the fucking 1950's and Alabama
Rules never got revoked by the High Court and owning human flesh was still ordinary everyday
business."

Wilt could only close his own eyes and lean back into the backrest of his seat, trying to keep himself
from lashing out or losing his marbles at the one and only person who had never been threatening or
betrayed him in his life. Angus was his friend and his brother; the enemies and crazies were out
there, out in the streets or in the damned churches getting lobotomized by the poisonous words the sluts-of-the-pews were spewing out, but Mac was safe, his rock and his best friend. They would make it through, somehow. He didn't know how, but he certainly had the best guy for figuring that out right by his side.

After another ten minutes of morbid, desperate silence, they began to move around the car, grabbing their luggage from the last mission so they could wash clothes, clean tools and pack a bigger, more varied kit for the coming out-of-country job they were expected to do. How that would end up...

"Well, at least in Vancouver we'll be away from the biggest concentrations of the worst crazies since none of them will make the effort to travel that far to reach us." thought Wilt despondently as the two depressive men brought their stuff into the living space and immediately went through the motions of securing and bunkering the entire property against vandals or concerted attack by a cult of madmen. Bozer almost had a heart attack when he saw Angus open a secret closet in his bedroom to access the hidden gun locker that held several weapons the Phoenix Foundation had obliged him to have on hand, even after he had explained his accident with shooting Jack to justify his refusal to shoot guns anymore.

The young white male unlocked the armored door and looked at the assault rifle, hunting rifle, shotgun, pistol, revolver, Taser pistol and assorted knives, batons and metal wire bobbins with vacant dead eyes, then slowly shifted his gaze over to his brother standing silently in the bedroom's doorway. For a second, he hallucinated a soul-searing image of Bozer's family hanging from a tree with all his little nieces and nephews tied at the base under a pile of oil-soaked junk as it erupted in a blaze, the evil chants of the white-robed Klansmen as a backdrop. Shaking off the dregs of the vision, Angus Timothy MacGyver asked God his forgiveness for being an oath-breaker as he took up the semi-automatic pistol that was similar to the one he trained with as an EOD tech for the US Army so many years ago and began the old routine of field stripping, reassembling and loading the second best friend a soldier in the field had after his M16 rifle.

Bozer saw the gestures but could only take a wild guess at what brought about the change. He knew his brother too much to not be aware of what the other male had seen or imagined that he now broke through the mental blockage that accidentally shooting a teammate in the field back in Pakistan, in his EOD tech days, had inflicted upon him. He had seen just how Mack had gazed emptily at him just now, and he knew what the overgrown kid his mother and grand-mother had pseudo-adopted so many years ago. Going to his own bedroom with steady steps, Bozer concentrated on planning the necessary jobs before they could go to bed in safety and the calls he would make to his extended kin to warn them of his out-of-country trip. But first, he had his own weapons and kit to field strip and load, which wouldn't happen on its own.

Captain on deck!

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 19:31pm

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 14:31pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 11:31am
UEO Fleet shipyards; drydock 1500-B, SeaQuest

New Cape Quest, Florida, UEO Territory

Commander Jonathan Ford and his superior, commander Oliver Hudson, were in one of the two small airlocks built just beneath the Cargo Elevator Deck in the ship's forward section, waiting for
the last batch of crew and passengers they would need before taking the ship out to sea. The drydock coffer had been filled up for several weeks already to complete a series of water-tightness tests and give the seamen some practice time on the many probes, shuttles and EVA suits that were now part of the ship's main mission package for year-round activity. The jet-copter would land on the pad then be lowered inside the hull, the roof closed and the boat would then begin its final departure sequence. The jet-copter was theirs for the keeping, it had simply done the run between the rooftop of the UEO Fleet Services building where the people were waiting and the ship; a simple but effective way to give the pilots some practice at landing on the new mobile platform in easy conditions while granting the crew an exceptional view of the boat at rest with two-thirds of the hull out of water and visible. That sight would be rare in the coming months and years as she accomplished her regular tours of duty.

Exactly on time, the jet-copter appeared and mere seconds later the sound of the combined rotor blades and jet turbines washed over the ship as the nimble medium-sized aircraft finalized its approach to land on a metal slab barely 20% bigger than its own footprint. Immediately, the pilots commenced the 'packing protocol' that stopped then folded the rotors, folded back the jets along the fuselage and made the chopper raise on its legs to then bring the floats completely under its main chassis to allow for the best mobility around the parked craft. The second small airlock on the other end of the CED opened to let out a pair of seamen with chains and ratchets to bind securely the vehicle to the elevator platform so it wouldn't slide during the elevator's vertical movement. Once situated on deck 'C' correctly, there would be solid hydraulic retention bars lowered and locked into place to forbid any lateral or vertical movement of the vehicle in case the ship had to perform emergency maneuvers.

Both Ford and Hudson climbed down the three flights of stairs to deck 'C' to welcome their last batch of people, especially the new captain. Or was that the old captain? Given the man had designed the ship some 25 years ago, it seemed more of a return home than a brand new posting to a new ship, although the shopping cart full of new gadgets and toys certainly gave the original crew some interesting feelings when they had to use them.

The two officers arrived on the parking level in time to see the airframe crew unlock the doors from inside to allow their passengers to disembark in single file from the jet-copter's rear ramp to facilitate reception and logging their presence into the ship's massively complex management programs. The very last to come out was an older man with white highly tanned skin, short silver hair, clean shaven features with clear blue eye and a lean athletic build that spoke of daily exercise and healthy diet. He gave his badge and letter of assignment to the security officer who was registering the inbound personnel, making the younger sailor stiffen at attention and snap of a smart salute towards the man who was dressed only in pale beige khakis and a duffel bag on his shoulder.

Getting a salute in return, the sailor processed his superior into the system and issued him his PAL unit, cabin keys and a new plastic ID card crafted like a high-tech credit card to be clipped to his clothes visibly at all times, even when using communal washroom facilities. Ford heard the man grunt in amusement at that very serious proclamation coming from a 1st class seaman who sounded like the entire navy depended on the procedure being followed. As the ship's new master was the last intake, the security detail moved out to clear the way for the airstrip boffins to clean and stow their bird. Those guys got mighty prissy whenever something kept them from babying the boat's one and only aircraft, and no self-loving sailor wanted to get into a turf war with the naval air corps. It couldn't be won anyways, so they just didn't. They'd settle for teasing them in the cafeteria instead; it was all in good fun, you see...

Commander Hudson saluted the ship's newly commissioned captain, Nathan Hale Bridger, and formally handed over control from the drydock's SQ Project Management Office over to him now that he was present in person. After getting the keys to the boat's SCIF and launch codes for the four
nuclear tipped Pilum hypersonic cruise missiles (successors of the Tomahawk), Hudson stood back
to let Ford come forward. Jonathan stepped up a pace, saluted then extended a hand to the old sailor
whom he knew from having been a student in his classes at the naval academy, half his life away.
Bridger gave him a small sad smile as he remembered that his son Robert had been close friends with
the black skinned officer from the academy until his death, seven years ago.

"Well, sir, unless you have any further need of my services, I will be going to the drydock admin
tower to clean out my office. It seems that I am out of a job as of now." Hudson said with good
humor. Completing the SeaQuest's rebuild had put him in the good books of many admirals and
companies, so he didn't think he'd have that many problems getting a new position soon.

Captain Bridger teased him a bit "What? Hasn't Andrea gotten you another one of her broken toys to
repair yet? I was certain I heard something about the Yatagan class ICBM tracker & destroyer project
having some water in the bilge that wasn't draining out. Weren't you supposed to transfer over there
the moment you're done here? I could have sworn I heard Bill say something..."

Snorting in similar humor, Hudson replied dismissively "Bah! Noyce! You know how the old
rumormonger is... He probably started that scuttlebutt just to see what the woman would answer
about it, when she returns from her holiday at home, in New Zealand. Not that I would absolutely
beg into the project, I'm not desperate, but I wouldn't beg out of it either. I may not be an actual
engineer or naval architect, but I think I finally understand just what you feel when you build
something this size and see it sail out to bring peace to the world. Honestly though, I hope my next
assignment has less politicians and company reps around it; I felt like I was on diplomatic bodyguard
duty half the time I was awake and dreamed about budget committees in my few hours of sleep."

"Ah! I knew it! You got it bad! And knowing Andrea Dre the way I do, she'll smell it on you and
have you in another design or rebuild project before January is over! Admit it! You won't even fight
her on it." Bridger snarked at the younger officer in jest.

Shrugging dismissively, Hudson replied gamely "I am a good soldier, captain; I go where my chain
of command sends me." And he said that with a straight face, too!

Laughing out loud at the shared joke, the three senior officers climbed up to deck 'A' then walked out
of the CED shaft towards the ship's port side and the captain's cabin. At least, those compartments
hadn't been re-purposed or renamed so finding his way around proved as easy for Nathan as if he
never left the ship in the first place. Using the brand new key, he opened the door and promptly
dumped the duffel bag on the empty desk surface while Ford and Hudson sat on the two 4-seat
couches that made up the conversation area of the cabin.

"Aren't you expected somewhere, Oliver?" Nathan called out amused, as he rifled through the closet
by the bunk to see what types of uniforms he had to change in before he walked to the bridge to
publicly present himself to the crew via the PAL system.

"Nah... I'm bumming you boys a lift to the harbor's seawall, to my other lift up to the UEO's main
building and my meeting with our dear US Ambassador to the UEO Council, Deidra Harkness. She
wants a personal account of the ship's capacities, and what exactly it will do for the US, now that it's
back in play. Somebody obviously has to remind her that the UEO Alliance owns the boat, not the
AC or the USA anymore, since that news seems to have not reached her in the 3+ years the boat was
sold out."

"My sincere condolences for your botched end of project." Ford smirked at the other commander, "It
was going so well up to date. To finish with more diplomats and bullheaded politicians... They really
don't respect us working stiffs anymore."
Hudson snorted in amusement whilst Bridger grabbed his clothes to go into the bathroom to change into working gear. Shaking his head in mock despair, he quipped "The young never learn until it's too late, don't they Oliver? But it's alright; he'll get there, eventually." The old mariner closed the door on the shared laughter of the other two sailors who would walk with him to the bridge.

{ SQ } - { You are not alone in this } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 14:57pm)

(Western America; 11:57am)

Nathan had most certainly NOT missed this type of thing: jumpsuits. Blergh! He understood, of course, the historical reasons why the daily service uniform for submariners had been designed as a jumpsuit, but he honestly always thought they could have moved on from dingy garage overalls to something just a bit more functional. And stylish. Jumpsuits looked good on the young and athletic, not on old biddies like himself.

Now dressed with his pockets filled and the all-important ID card clipped to his chest pocket visibly, Nathan had to admit he felt a lot more like a working man than he had in the last six years since Carol had passed away. Doing a few odd contracts over the internet to keep his mind busy and have a small revenue besides his royalties and investments had helped him keep in contact with humanity, but not that much. His private island was rather isolated; it took almost four hours by boat to reach it from Florida's southern coast, so even grocery shopping was an all-day chore.

Walking out of the en-suite bathroom, Nathan was rolling up his sleeves to be more comfortable in the tightly controlled climate when a loud insistent BEEP was heard throughout the cabin. Across the conversation area, near the large drawing table, shelves and trio of wall mounted Internex monitors, a stout dodecagonal pedestal glowed as it generated a 3D holographic film in a cloud of silvery gas. The image showed a young child, about 13 years old, with milky white skin, very thin features and physical frame, serious penetrating blue eyes and stringy shoulder length blond hair that made him look like an upright yellow sheep.

"Warning! The PAL system has detected a new official user for this cabin. This compartment is subject to security requirements for senior officers, for command level authority and SCIF UEO-#2 clearance. You MUST log into the PAL applications through the Angelator AL-C1-a/mr holo-interface console to complete the 'user login' protocols before you do anything else as it might make your movements and work around the ship subject to unpredictable security alerts & access refusals. Failure to comply within the following 30 minutes will see a security detail hunt you down as an infiltrated spy. Thank you for your collaboration."

The boy's image was replaced by one of an old fashioned grand-father clock that was going backwards in a countdown, with the needle going towards an icon of an exploding bomb. My, how inspiring! Nathan walked around the back of the couch near the entry door to reach the console to figure out how the thing worked so he could log into the programs and defuse this timer. As it was, the process was mostly automated; he just swiped his ID card over a lens, put the PAL unit from his uniform pocket in the charging dock to prime the access codes & priority frequencies attributed to the ship's master, then answered a few short questions about any social media or personal coordinates that were asked. The answers he gave helped the device to analyze his voice print to configure the vocal command apps while also giving the security routines something to work on to find if any threats or intel chatter about him was going around. After 5 minutes of relatively painless Q&A, the system beeped that the ID protocols had been completed successfully and he was now free to roam the ship, to use his card and PAL at will until the next updates or system-wide reboot.

Nathan was flummoxed to see that the system had somehow managed to log into his home through
the active Internex connection to find his preferences and configurations on his devices then
download the settings and apply them automatically to all matching devices and apps in the cabin.
Inside of ten minutes after having completed his ID process, the entirety of the cabin's electronics for
work or entertainment had become clones of his household setup without any effort or annoyance on
his part.

Now, that was service! Nathan knew hotels not that good with their clients.

"Yeah, it scared the bejeezus outta me too, the first time it did that." Jonathan Ford commented softly
from where he sat. "You'll find that the level of automation and humanless management of resources
and situations is pretty astounding. And it scares the crap out of us. At some point, you gotta ask if
sailors still have a place in the ships we build... And with the number of drones we carry to do EVA
jobs instead of divers, it isn't a dumb sci-fi nerd question anymore."

Hudson made an assenting noise from his seat on the second couch. Looking into empty air towards
the inner workings of the ship, the senior commander grumbled "Ain't that the truth. When we found
them holo-imagers, we thought they wouldn't be any problems. Just like ordinary Internex monitors;
unplug, move and re-plug. No biggy. No, THAT system doesn't work like that. The opinionated
little runt in the image has ideas and views about everything, and he don't like getting moved around.
And just you try to plug him on the wrong wires or not give him enough electricity to work on full
strength to see what happens! The damned little jack-in-the-box from Hell can actually hack the
power management grid to get the juice he needs and prioritize himself over anything but life-support
or sickbay. We never figured out how the dumb can does it, either. We called Wolenbahn
Electronics, the company that sells them, and they told us that we needed somebody with a bloody
SCIF Level-2 clearance to get the drawings and the access codes to reconfigure the consoles out of
the modes bought by the UEO back in 2016 when they were shipped and installed. And no, Andrea
never was convinced that we needed to change them that much."

Ford shrugged lamely. "You get used to them watching and talking to you when you work in a room
that has one in it. Since there's only a few on the entire ship, and not in the most passing places
either, it hasn't been much of a hardship. It was a cultural shock the first few times, I'll give you that."

The new captain grumbled about not being master on his own boat with so many politicians running
around him, and now, this virtual kid was trying to hold his hand while he did his job to boot! Just
how little control over this tub did have left, anyways?

"Do you want a realistic answer to that question, or just some platitudes that your fragile ego will
survive without giving you a coronary?" snarked the suddenly present image of the young teenager,
floating above the pedestal.

Bridger turned disbelieving eyes to his fellow sailors only to see them shrug helplessly. "Yeah, I
meant to warn you about that." Ford said blithely. "He tends to just wake up and say stuff without
being asked if you speak aloud or gesticulate too much around the console. It's got a full suite of all-
around sensors for sound and imagery so he can pick up any voice commands or little noises for
analysis and the program can also see and 'read' sign language because it's has a priority line into the
universal translation & ciphering applications. So... Get used to unsolicited advice from a barely
tenaged kid at odd hours during your work shift when you have one of those console nearby."

Hudson made a vague gesture with his left hand. "Don't worry, the holo-assistant isn't so bad. It's just
like a boosted 'Alexa' or 'Cortana' with better imaging and a much wider vocabulary. I had one in my
office in the drydock tower but I kept it busy by siccing Andrea on it when she wanted too many
technical details that I was clueless about. It kept them both busy and out of my thinning hairline, so
it was all good." he finished with a shit-eating grin directed at the new captain.
Bridger glared at the floating gaseous 13 year old boy who was actually giving him the same stubborn look that Robert had back at that age when he didn't want to let go of his video game to go to bed on school nights. Damn! He was too old to be a father again! Maybe the system had a function to age the presentation and response style of the holo-assistant? He'd ask later tonight, once he was alone with his unpacking and his thoughts.

"Alright people, let's get this show on the road. Out! Were marching to the bridge." Nathan shooed them out, remarking from the side of his eye that the virtual kid was making bye-bye motions at them before winking out of existence as the console went to sleep mode. Damn, that was weird!

{ SQ } - { A steady hand on the tiller } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 15:21pm)

(Western America; 12:21pm)

A few minutes of brisk walk was all they needed to reach the clamshell doors on the left side of the bridge. Nathan saw easily that security was tighter than before; instead of just a big red button to call inside and a camera to smile at, they now had to pass their ID cards and place their right hand on the scanner to get formally identified, all the while saying their name and rank out loud for the voice print analyzer to confirm. Once they were correctly identified, the security officer inside the bridge triggered the locks to open and let the people in, closing the doors right after they had passed.

"It's an access restriction put in place since we are operating under the 'Noah's Ark' protocol; nobody leaves the doors wide open until the civil insurgency situation is resolved." Hudson explained when he saw the pensive look on Bridger's face.

The older mariner nodded silently his understanding as he moved his head to gaze deeper into all the changes that were made to his original creation. Right to his right were three stations facing forward with an incredible amount of small monitors stacked in two columns besides two medium ones set over each other in the middle before each chair. They also had two different keyboards, two mice and an electronic drawing pad that any architect or engineer would drool over in envy. On the ends of the trio, on each side, were a small 2-drawer file cabinet with a solidly bolted multi-function color laser printer to create solid copies of all the work they did to protect it from hackers or system failures.

Turning a bit more to the right, Nathan saw the food bar, the two large fridges and the two water closets that were now set into the bridge's steel structure to reinforce the back-end of the long, wide oval room.

That wasn't the only strengthening the room had received. In fact, he could see that the command chair was placed on a raised dais, some three steps above the main floor, and four large metal beams going from floor to ceiling had been installed to hold aloft a set of small, soft, reading lights and no less than 8 full-sized Internex monitors, all of them adjustable at the needs of the person sitting in the chair. Another feature was that the pillar front-left had an old analog telephone with push button keypad on the base and wires for both handset and the hard-link to the system. Nathan planned to ask about that to his comms chief, later on. The pillar front-right had several old instruments set one atop the other; several analog clocks, a compass, an elevation & attitude pendulum, a barometer and a metal trellis basket to set paper maps at hand.

The command chair had been changed altogether too. It was much bigger, with wider and deeper seat, taller backrest and a head rest the old model hadn't had. The leg panel and foot rest were new too. But what took the cake was the two curved tables mounted to the armrests that could pivot to become a single solid surface in front of the user. Each of the two panels had one medium monitor
with three small ones on the outer side at its far edge, and the colored glass tabletop was a combination touchscreen keyboard and drawing tablet. When the two halves were joined, the two medium monitors appeared to be seamless so the image shown was 12 inches high by 48 inches wide. Nathan realized as he passed a hand over his new chair that it was actually composed of several articulated segments that allowed to adjust to the physiognomy of the user. Small buttons on the armrests showed the controls for the PAL system, telephony and satellite comms on the right armrest while controls for the chair's module positions, temperature and massage rollers were on the left. On the outer sides of the chair were permanent solid compartments to store paperwork, maps or log books while small hidden compartments set between the base of the screens and the colored glass interfaces of the tables contained the office supplies to write, draw or help mental calculations like the slide-ruler he found.

Whomever had designed this new command station had obviously spent some effort and spoken with people of experience. Nathan could only groan in misery at the thought of just how much time he had wasted looking tall and useless in his chair while three piles of paperwork waited in his office. Oftentimes, having the captain and first officer on the bridge was a waste of their time, considering just how much administrative paperwork they had to file, on top of ship inspections, department meetings and running emergency or combat drills at least once a week. With a chair setup like this, he could be on the bridge AND complete his damnable admin at the same time. Looking around, he was gratified to see that all the senior officers' stations had been modified more or less along the same idea of making it easier to be present and fill out the paperwork physically or by touchscreen. The placement of the first and second officers was also changed a bit to allow for more airy desks and better chairs. A few steps had him confirm that, yes, these were also tempered but didn't have the multi-module adjustments nor the massage system.

Oh, well... Captain's privilege and all that...

Jonathan Ford was smirking at his new boss as the older man examined the furniture and positions of things, so different from his original designs. He just couldn't resist pulling his leg a bit, as his friend Robert had told him how his dad liked a well placed quip when it was done respectfully and the person targeted could laugh along with the jokester. "That throne in the middle is a gift from Andrea Dre for whomever became the new CO. She said something to the effect that 'The boat's enough of a burden, the least I can do is make paperwork time easier to bear.' I think she was really hoping to ply that chair as a reward for the guy who took the job, but the way things went..." he completed with a bigger smirk while Oliver Hudson chuckled in the background.

Nathan gave his new Ex-O a tolerant side glance as he turned towards the quad of helm chairs in the front, much bigger, sturdier and now multi-segmented with temperature and massage systems to help the pilots endure longer against strong currents or storm winds when on the surface. They would still face conditions when changing helmsmen every half-shift or less was obligatory, but this could at least help the guys stay steadier and have less cramps when they left the chairs to the next man.

Turning back towards the command chair, captain Bridger saw something hanging from the ceiling that he hadn't seen yet. It was a track embedded into the entire ceiling all around the room in the shape of a twelve-point star. This track had an electric winch that was presently parked above the bridge's moonpool that led into the network of ship-wide Aqua-Tubes. Having assisted in designing and building many things for the US Navy in the last thirty years, Nathan didn't need a big imagination to understand why that had been built or why it was kept there. In case of battle damage or new system upgrades, the winch could help to move things for installation or even lift them from or into the pool for movement through the water filled tubes. Not a dumb idea...

Finally sitting himself in his brand new command chair, Nathan saw the small lens on the right armrest begin to blink and a message appeared in the screens all around his station, demanding him
to identify the current user. He swiped his ID card then placed his PAL unit in the hard dock located just near the table pivot on the right armrest. The systems began to adjust the position of the chair modules and the two tables closed together over him to become a seamless solid board to work or lean on. Now seated fully, the captain could see a few more little gadgets like the recessed round metal disk near the table pivot on the left armrest. The colored slider next to it showed it was an induction device to either chill or heat a mug the lower end of which was striated to screw into the disk to avoid spillage in rough seas. Humph! Not a bad idea as such, but certainly a piece of luxury no other captain in the fleet had. With a smirk, Nathan thought it was their fault for not accepting this posting before the UEO got to sending him the invite. His boat, his perks.

Leaning backwards into the backrest, Nathan put his elbows on the table, joined his hands in front of his chin and asked "Operations; how soon to leave the drydock?"

The ship's second officer and chief of engineering, lieutenant-commander Katherine Hitchcock swiveled her chair to face her new superior officer and couldn't help the thought that the chair looked as if it had been constructed just for him. "Sir! The coffer is full and the retention doors have been opened to full aperture. We have received the all-clear from drydock 1500-B to proceed when ready, the taxiway in the main canal is empty of capital traffic, with only a few sub-fighters sniffing around on their routine patrols. My board is green across all structural, technical and support departments."

Commander Ford had seated himself at his permanent station, giving the departments one last checkup before swiveling back towards his new leader. "Sir! All security, weapons and administrative departments are ready to sail. We can launch for the shakedown cruise at your signal, sir."

The clamshell doors on the right side of the bridge opened to let in a pair of very different people who were walking side by side amicably. The two marched until they reached the banister that delimited the walkway around the command dais and presented themselves to the ship's new master.

The rotund white male with a short brownish beard and shorter graying hair gave a military salute to his leader as he called out "Sir! Senior lieutenant Manilow Crocker, chief of security and weaponry, sir! Welcome aboard, Nathan! It's been a bloody long time since I heard from you. All good on your side, old man?"

Snorting at her companion's familiarity with the new captain, the obviously civilian woman wore what looked like a green 2-piece uniform covered by a long white lab coat. She had white tanned skin, green eyes and long rust-red hair flowing down freely to mid-back. She spoke with a slightly nasal, just a tad snobbish, upper class British accent when she extended her hand to the new CO. "Welcome aboard the motorized Bedlam we call home, captain. Kristen Westphalen, doctor of human medicine, veterinary medicine, biochemistry and genetics at your service. I am the ship's chief of medicine in charge of the sickbay as well as remote field medicine and a few research projects that fall into my specialties, like the resident dolphin, whom I am told you know personally?"

Nathan swiveled his large chair around to glare at Hudson. "What does she mean by 'a dolphin I know personally', hum?" he asked with trepidation.

Oliver smirked and pointed at the now occupied moonpool besides him, to the sea mammal that was bouncing up and down excitedly inside the enclosed metal and crystal canopy. Oliver stepped down to the front of the pool and worked the levers to unlock the lid and open it. The dolphin immediately raised itself to the semicircular bench that was a foot beneath the rim and tried to look around the strange unfamiliar room with many people. Just as Hudson was about to speak, a buzzing sound came from the wellhead as several small lights emitted bluish beams that passed through the dolphin, scanning him before they stopped. An odd canary-yellow box bolted to the side of the moonpool
automatically unlocked and opened, deploying a set of small loudspeakers from which a synthetic voice was projected loud enough for the entire bridge to hear it clearly.


Standing up from his command chair, Nathan walked to the edge of the water basin, stopping at arm's length to scrutinize the sea mammal. Yes, it was the juvenile bottlenose dolphin he had rescued from poachers a few years ago, near his private island. The same dolphin that had refused to leave him alone these past four years and been so much help in giving him the little company and living interaction he could tolerate before it became too much to handle. Dolphins didn't have the cares of human society, only the needs of food, shelter and health; such a simple life that allowed them to have a simple friendship, even when they couldn't speak words.

"How?" Nathan asked hoarsely, dumbfounded in awe of the miracle before him.

Doctor Westphalen walked to stand next to the water basin, letting her hand trail in the warm sea water before gently stroking the curious but friendly gray dolphin. "It is one of the many functions in the ship's central computer. The Universal Translation program we use is a product of Wolenbahn electronics called 'WEI Conclave 3 b/mr Universal Translation & Ciphering Network' or UTCN for short. It is actually capable of receiving input from cameras or drawing pads along the usual microphones or keyboards so it can interpret and translate icons, pictographs, glyphs or even sign language. It is quite the hit with our scientists for whom English is not their birth tongue. One of the unforeseen effects of such a high performance program was that it interlaces seamlessly with the PAL systems and all the phonic or written comms we have, including the newly installed hydrophones that dot the Aqua-Tubes and the ship's outer hull at chosen emplacements."

Nathan almost needed to sit down again because he was overwhelmed by emotion. "Are you telling me that some programmer who has never seen a dolphin in his life, let alone touched one in person, has – ACCIDENTALLY – breached the species barrier to speak with a sea mammal? And then nobody thought to make this public?"

Kristen was shameless as she replied with a wide smile "Honestly, captain! If you think a talking dolphin is the be-all-end-all of this ship, you will have a heart attack before dinner. Why don't you put your oversized pool toy in the sea and then come visit me on sea-deck. We have much to discuss over tea and biscuits. I made the shortbreads myself. And don't you let the louts in security tell you they're bad! Every time I bake a tray, some boy in blue tries to 'confiscate the health hazard' but I'm not blind! I know full well my culinary capacities. So, play with your shiny new boat then follow the dolphin to sea-deck. I have some inventory and research reports to file anyways." on this, she turned heels and walked off the bridge, leaving a nonplussed captain and highly amused sailors that were laughing aloud at his plight.

And yes, he said plight. How else should he call this ordeal of a boat?

Cross-burner in chief

(US National Anthem)

Western Africa; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 23:50pm (midnight)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 16:50pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 13:50pm

White House; Oval Office
All around the edifice known to the Earth as The White House, heavy military vehicles were rolling into position, unloading tripod mounted machine guns or grenade launchers while others brought in ready to use pre-cast concrete gunnery cabins that would be connected to electricity and wired comms the moment they were on the ground to reinforce the national monument's entries and symmetrical intervals around the perimeter fence.

All the soldiers were working feverishly towards what THEY considered a worthy, highly moral common goal; the instauration of a Pure, True, Christian Governance over the peoples of America then the willful, forceful spreading of this Faith and Governance to all others on Earth. While the 'Governance', 'Christian' and 'True' parts of this statement could cover pretty much anybody in US society without too much troubles (other than atheists and, you know, followers of other cults...), there was no ways in tarnation that 'Pure' would ever mean anything else than 'WHITE ONLY'.

It was no wonder then that under all the cement-gray urban camouflage fatigues of the toiling soldiers you could only see lily-white skin, and then only 1 woman per 40 men in action. Most women would eventually be pulled back from combat & front-line duty unless they were infertile or known lesbians who wanted to repent their sins honorably by mortifying their flesh through training and killing heathen infidels in the Name of the Holy Cross.

It was nearing 05:00pm on the east coast but peoples from all walks of life across the entire country who hadn't been impacted directly by the rapidly escalating violence were sitting down in front of their Internex monitors to watch the much anticipated Presidential Address to the Nation that was coming up. In fact, even those impacted by unrest, violence and injuries would see it too as most hospitals, clinics, shelters, fire stations, ambulance garages and police stations or prisons would set their television sets to receive it. Almost all schools had canceled classes until new orders and most boarding schools had offered to keep the kids inside their walls where it was thought they would be safe. After the speech, it would be seen that nobody's plans had ever been on the mark, nor sufficient to compensate for the ginormous clusterfuck that was exploding in their faces.

The program had been declared 'mandatory emergency broadcast' by the White House thus obliging all media outlets to grant the program absolute priority over anything else without charging the government any price for it. At exactly 17:00pm US east coast time, all channels for TV, radio, CB, shortwave radio and several hundred news websites were hijacked by the US Department of Communications with permission and assistance of their owners to facilitate the country-wide broadcast of the program.

As the image of the last commercial faded to black, it was replaced by an animated film of what looked like an American Flag flying lazily in the soft wind, hung under the right arm of a wooden White Cross planted solidly atop a snow capped mountain peppered with green pines and frozen waterfalls that made for an incredibly powerful emotional pull on the audience.

As the image closed in on the Cross & Flag, details became clearer for the viewers, thusly exponentializing the discomfort for hundreds of thousands.
The huge wooden crucifix was based on a mix of models but the frame was clearly patterned after the ancient 'High Celtic Cross' with a nimbus around the crossing of the bars and widening, flaring ends to the arms, head and feet. The beam-end decorations were similar to a 'St-Thomas cross' with a touch of 'Caucasian Albanian' styling in the flowery designs at the ends of the foot and arms, emerging from within the splayed belled end caps. The middle joint of the crossed beams was sculpted in the form of a 'pectoral cross of Cuthbert' with a red Blood Drop over blue field in the central disc. The whitewashed wood was highlighted by gold lines along the edges of the millwork and an azure blue finish on the oval head point of the crucifix served as noble celestial background for the golden rendition of a 'Royal Crossed Globe', which is an image of Earth surmounted by a 'Papal Cross', the symbol of Christian Kings for nigh on 14 centuries and more. Written in the horizontal beam in azure block letters was the latin phrase 'In hoc signo vinces' that meant 'In this Sign thou shalt conquer'.

The global unease was getting worse as the image lowered and centered on the newly redesigned flag.

The American Flag had been modified more fundamentally, no longer resembling what it had been. The original red and white stripes became red and blue instead, with a new a golden stringy fringe added all around the flag. The 50 white stars over blue field in the upper left were replaced by a single large sigil on a white round-cornered rectangle in the middle of the flag. This new heraldic was created by a gold-rimmed azure blazon inside which was a golden 'Jerusalem Cross' topped by a golden European 'Christian Royal Crown' that had a small, white-rimmed, red 'Blood Drop' in the center. It was no longer an 'American' icon but a 'Christian World' flag instead.


After showing in great close-up details the new National Regalia of the Flagged Crucifer that would become the rallying point and symbol of patriotic duty for the citizens and allies of Pure Christian America the Exceptional across all of the world given them by Jesus, their True God, the Lord Redemptor in His Almight, the image shifted to a view inside the Oval Office of the White House.

Nobody recognized the room anymore.

It now sported opaque ivory white drapes lined in azure details with golden ropes to tie them open so the waning light of the winter sky could flow in. The carpets had been ripped out and the hard wood floors polished to a dark finish. Most of the original furniture had been replaced by clearly vintage accoutrements that would not be out of place in the meeting room of an abbatial council in the Great Abbeys of Northern Europe during the middle Ages or Renaissance. Thick heavy woodworks hewn from oak and maple stained dark, upholstered in deep blue velvet and covered by animal furs that still had the heads attached to be clearly presented as symbols of strength and manhood by the owner of the room. Even the coffee table where once the Defense Intelligence Agency's vital reports had been read and notated had been replaced by a rectangular viking wrought iron firepot with live flames ablaze in its charcoal embers to give the place the feel of a castle's war room where Lords of Faith and Power congregate to pray, speak powerfully and decide in God's Name on the lives of millions.

The Resolute desk had been replaced by a gothic bishop's throne fit for the Catholic Pope and a large deep desk covered in woodwork religious reliefs now held the technology and office supplies needed by the Lider Maximo. In the middle of the desk's front panel was a large sigil similar to the one that replaced the stars on the flag, and a foot tall model of the Flagged Crucifer sat on the right hand corner of the desktop, with a votive candle burning atop each arm of the small cross.

{ SQ } - { A message of hate, crusade and enslavement } - { SQ }
Seated in the shadowy depths of the stained oak throne was the currently seated, and barely reelected, President of the United States of America, the honorable Donald J. Trump. Except he was barely recognizable to his population, even for those who voted for him twice.

The now 74 year old man had somehow, overnight, bleached out his continuously tanned skin back into a milky white complexion more in line with the Caucasian Nordic – Slavic ideal that he now openly preached about. His thin blond hair had been combed backwards and loosely braided with a white felt ribbon tying off the end of the short affair. Instead of the usual expensive dark blue 2-piece business suit he normally wore, he was now presented in an ivory white 4-piece ensemble composed of trousers, shirt, tunic and a tabard similar to that of the Templar Knights in the Crusades. A large colored Crucifer, but without the flag, was embroidered on the tabard's front and small leather shoulder pads embossed with the new Christian World Flag decorated the upper biceps of the tunic, apparent since the tabard was naturally sleeveless. A heavy silver gothic style medallion representing the Crowned Cross of Jerusalem hung on a thick silver chain around his neck and a silver ring bearing a gothified version of the American Eagle sat on the middle finger of his right hand.

At exactly 17:05pm, the man whom many had once thought of as 'The Leader of the Free World' would change minds and realities for generations to come. He began his oration still seated in his great throne.

"Hear ye, hear ye, and hear ye this, you scurrilous knaves and scandalous heathens! I be speaking to thee, thou soulless husks that claim atheism and false gods that know not the One Truth!"

"I am the Papal Lord Amerikus; Donald John Trump, baptized White Knight of Christ, and first-named Son of the Living Christ in this here land, the Pure and True America, the Exceptional and Great America, the land Chosen by God, Jesus our Lord and Savior, to lead all others unto the Light of Liberty from sins and Salvation from Hell's pits! Amen, I said!"

"I come to your homes, places of work and shelters from the storming winds with Merry News and Glad Tidings from the very mouth of Jesus, the one and only True God of the Christian Bible! Hallelujah, I said! As it was written in the Times of the Romans, them vile pagans, debauched lords and drunken scandalous louts, so now comes to fruition the Great Divine Plan for our humble yet eager Nation filled with the honest and forthright Servants of God. As It was spoken in Holy Truth, from His own mouth, then Scriptured obediently by Faithful Men of the Cross, so now Comes to Pass the Times of the Tribulations that were Revealed in Prophecy! Amen and Hallelujah, I said!"

"Now, I know full well and surely, that the heathens and atheists who willfully give their empty husks to Satan as tools of his nefarious hellish plans for Armageddon will conspuate me, vilify me, or even mock, heckle and jeer powerlessly at effigies of me when I turn away from their crass debasement to ignore their worthless sedition. I know this, for He Who Was Risen has spoken this to mine own ear! Amen, brothers and sons! And in His Holy Truth chanted by the Angels in Celestial Choir will I believe! He IS my personal Savior and Redeemer and HE IS RISEN! All other 'truths' are proven naught but LIES before the one and only TRUTH of the Christian God's own miracle of resurrection and gifting unto his servants, The Worthies, the Blessings and Favors from On High as befit His godly power and status amongst all other realms! Hallelujah, boys and warriors of the Faith! Amen, I have said in True Faith!"

"But, beware now the False Speakers! Them dirty belly-crawling worms! Slithering, they do come, out of the carrion of a dying society, to spit poison in your souls like the Serpent of Eden hath once done to deter Adam and Eve from the servile obedience due unto the Rod of God's disciplines upon
them! Never again, I say! Amen! In Jesus' name our Savior we obey!

"Never again will the unworthy be given the rights of speech or movement in our Pure and True Faithful society that we will build. Amen!"

"Never again will disgusting juden rassen be allowed to steal land or jobs or riches from our citizens and pollute or towns! Amen!

"Never again will them slave-stock niggers and mulatos and métis and métèques and gypsies ever sully our daughters with their foul seed! Amen!"

Never again will the slave-stock's debased females, them mule-headed she-animals, steal the bloodlines of our Legacy to our sons and grand-sons! Amen!"

"Never again will the queers and faggot peggers despoil the bodies and destroy the souls of our innocent Pure and True white sons in the Land our God gave unto us! Amen!

"Never again will women and females and lesbian dykes and tranny pervies ever again have anything to say or speak or make noise about on the subjects of Faith, Power, Nation, Governance and the Great Holy Crusade compelled into our souls eternal by God, His Own Divine Self, as he set it in motion in the Time of Prophecy! Hallelujah and Amen to that, fathers and uncles, brothers and cousins, sons and nephews!"

"Never again will the unemployed and the homeless and the hobos be a burden upon the finances of the State! Never again will the - unschooled - get handouts from the State! Those that are fit enough in body and mind will be put to work in Great America Projects like the much anticipated South Wall, and maybe even a North Wall as well, until Canada joins us under God's Purifying Halo. We will never again let the whims of progressive bleeding-heart liberals run our Nation and waste our taxes like some Euro-commie potentate that should have died during the Cold War! By the tenets of 'Prosperity Gospels' money is a material proof of God's judgment and approval upon a person; the more you have, the more God approves of what you did in His Name! And nobody is gonna go around stealing God's rewards from your pockets or bank account anymore! Amen!"

"Never again will the untermenschen, those 'maybe, partially, not truly white' diseased, defective mentally sub-human under-beings ever again have rights and places in our society! We will be a Nation of Greats and Giants as was ordained by the Lord God, Jesus Himself, not a debauched country of sickly deformed wastrels and mentally corrupted inept spawns of trash! Amen!

"Never again will the Souls Eternal of the Men-of-the-Cross be declared less than functional, diseased or insane by the fell apostles of Satan's Hellish Plan; the doctors, the pharmacists, and nurses! Them foul poison spewing liars that dwell in the dark butchering rooms and cold humid torturing halls that were lyingly called hospitals but serve to hide evil alchemies that rot the body, vile rituals of carnal debauchery and... And, yes!... The moste potente tenebrarum of putrid Necromancy! Or, as it is named and practiced in modern epochs by its spurious Satanic zealots, PSYCHIATRY! We will never again be judged by these miscreant Servant of the Pits! We will never again be shamed and laid low by the poisonous lies, vapid word-twists, and scurrilous drawings and schemas of the human brain! Only GOD understands the human soul! Only GOD understands the human mind! Only GOD can see whose healthy, whose sane, and whose a corrupted perverted SINNER! Only by believing, adoring, worshiping and obeying our Lord God of the Bible, Jesus the Christian Christ, Redeemer of the Cross of Christian Crucifixion, Who was Martyred and Risen, can you be kept healthy and sane! Only His True and Pure White Light can grant you reprieve from illness and injury! Abandon all the lies and false hopes of doctors, nurses, and them poison peddling drug pushers the pharmacists, and ye shall be delivered from harms of the flesh and soul! A most heartfelt Hallelujah and truly resplendent AMEN to you all, grand-fathers, fathers, brothers, sons and
nephews under God's Law and Light!"

"A Glorious Hallelujah and a resplendent Amen to Men being powerful Manly Men again!"

The newly minted Papal Lord Amerikus stood from behind his desk to walk towards the camera, now showing what was around his waistline; a thick heavy leather belt with multiple cruel implements that promised his reign would be anything but fair, just, merciful and equitable for all. Now stood about ten feet in front of the lens, besides one of the massive medieval couches, he spread out his arms widely, calling out loud for all to hear.

"Harken and behold, ye low lived servants of the Prince of Lies & Dark Pits! Amen upon the Faithful that see this and know not fear! I bless them aplenty, In Jesus' name, our God the Redemptor, I so speak! Now see these here tools of the Power of Christian Authority as they were given to us by the God of the Cross in his Days of Passion before he died and Rose Anew! Watch and fear, you that gave your empty husks and deviant minds to Satan's legions!"

He pointed to his right side, near his dominant hand; "The Rod of Disciplines, a Holy Sacrament in its own self, it is! A stout wooden pole to break the foul tempers and spoiled attitudes of boys and girls the world over, to bring them back into docile submissiveness to their fathers! Amen to THAT indeed!"

He pointed at the middle of his belt, near the huge decorative buckle; "The Scourge, just like the Romans used upon the bare fleshes of our Risen Savior in the Time of the Passion whence he expressed his Love and Redemption of our unworthy souls. 13 braided leather thongs with spiked lead balls threaded into the lashes to make adult criminals repent fully unto Purity, or make the grownest boys wish they hadn't strayed and acted out of their age and station in life! Amen to THAT indeed!"

He pointed to the left side of his belt where only his left hand could reach easily; "That here is the Noose. A simple, solid length of hemp, braided and knotted by faithful hands, just like in the Days of the Romans, and it can be used for sooo many things! It can flog the beasts and slaves since they don't ever deserve the touch of a Rod or Scourge! It can lynch the runaways who rebel against their parents or just the common criminal that's passed any Salvation anymore. Or, it can be put in a set to wrack confessions and information from the soulless husks of seditious heretics! Amen to THAT indeed!"

As the old man slowed down the breakneck pace of his diatribe, he used the sleeve of his right arm to wipe away the sweat on his brow and face, giving the impression of an athlete having just undergone great physical trials by how winded and out of sorts he suddenly was. Blinking his eyes tiredly, the geriatric hatemonger leaned on the couch to his side with his right hand, using the left one to fish under his tabard for an object to present and speak one last threat to the world at large.

"And now behold the Clean Steel, the Tool of My Great Plan, sayeth the Lord unto his massed hordes of Faithful Worthies, as they knelt in submissiveness before the Altar plinth upon which rested his Great Throne of High Authority. First were swords, then arrowheads, and now this; the Gun Almighty! In His Name and none other, do I declare that 'gun rights' are in fact religious 'Holy Rights' that none shall rule, judge, legislate or blockade but ME, the Papal Lord Amerikus! Amen to THAT indeed, sons of America!"

"Now, as we leave you for your evening meal, I will order, command, declare and proclamate most imperially from On High, the following vital and fundamental news. As of this moment, by my hand and will under Jesus our God, I declare that the Supreme Court is VACANT and no longer operative under the aegis of Christian American Governance. This will be so until a panel of 13 new judges can be selected, therefore all appeals to the higher court will be stalled until then. Hallelujah for some
"Secondly, I hereby suspend and revoke the defunct, defective, weak willed constitution that was written 200 years ago! By my order and will under Jesus our God, a new constitution with updated business laws, gun laws and family laws will be drafted and voted on by the newly modeled Congress when they have new elections, sometime later this year. Hallelujah to THAT!"

"Finally, I give this order to all law enforcement officers or agents, all military personnel and all contractors of the National Governance, at any and all levels they get their contracts or badges. I hereby extend, without limits not specifically written in the Bible under God's own command, that white men of good Faith and Purity not be worried legally or socially or financially for having done God's Holy Works. By that I mean culling the sub-humans, keeping the slave-stock docile and workable, or keeping any and all children, especially boys, silent and submissive to the penultimate limitless authority of Manly White Men as is the Law of the Christian Bible as per the Rod of Disciplines. Hallelujah and Amen to THAT!"

With great snorting breaths and weird nervous ticks about the eyes, the president-turned-king sat himself ponderously on the couch he had leaned upon to stay upright and made a signal towards the camera. Twelve old white men, all dressed like the erstwhile Papal Lord, came to kneel by his side to kiss the Eagle Sigil on his right hand before sitting on the 4 couches around the firepot for the first official meeting of the Pure True Paladin-Crusaders of America.

{ SQ } - { The Beginning of the End } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 17:45pm)

(Western America; 14:45pm)

It was pitifully little peace of mind for those auditors still logical and pragmatic that none of the old duly elected administration officials had been present at the meeting. It was far less reassuring or even helpful to see on screen 1 minute later, when the meeting became secret, the severed heads of dozens of senior elected & nominated officials stuck on the fence points around the White House perimeter. The victims of the internal purge were diverse and far-reaching; Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders were right over the main gateway while Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Mitch McConnel were clustered around the supplies delivery gate in the back. With a few hundred points on the fence, it was completely sickening to see they were all occupied already and soldiers were actually setting up artisanal wooden rakes with thick points to mount more heads as they were brought for display.

Only a small handful of officials and bureaucrats had survived Trump's own version of the Nazi's Röhm-Putsch, the 'Night of Long Knives', by the sheer luck of being those selected to attend the Lake Barcroft convention for the 'Noah's Ark' protocol or made to leave Washington DC and Virginia altogether under 'Last Survivor' protocols to keep the Free Government running somehow in case of an full-on civil war. It was that, and so much more. At this point, with so much division of race, religion and age, it was debatable whether the country could, or would, ever reunite again.

Well, the world had been worried about the president's competence and reliability for 4 years now, they had their answer on Trump's mental abilities and policies at long last. Strangely enough though, that wasn't helping anybody anymore.

{ SQ } - { PREVIEW ch.7 } - { SQ }

Lucas is handling some legal problems, then adding to his doomsday preps as the situation in the USA degenerates faster and harder than anybody could ever have anticipated. Some contractors are
hired, personal resources are mobilized and secret safe houses in many localities are bought
anonymously with contracts paid to have them prepared.

The NCIS team is finally assembled after a tumultuous day and night of house cleaning.

The DXS team go through a hard night and morning before uniting with the NCIS team in
preparation for the trip to the airfield, which is in doubt due to all the civil unrest.

The SeaQuest receives its first critical mission under captain Bridger and it doesn't please anybody,
but the guests they get are even less pleased at the irony of their situations, especially when Billy
Noyce comes to visit them in all his rotund porcine glory. They wanted to drop his name and invoke
his power? They would get to see up close what that power looked and felt like in person.

Janet Noyce goes towards Los Angeles, intent on an urgent meeting with an old friend, planning
mayhem, corruption, death and inhumanities aplenty along the way, much to the chagrin of her travel
mates who, more often than not, are the intended targets of her ire, or at least the vectors of it. There
were very good reasons why the CIA had retired 'La Pâtissière du Diable' from any field duty after
her unfortunate deployment in France thirty odd years ago. The US embassy in Paris still had the
worse reputation of them all for making its guests 'sick' (or 'dead') with sub-par catering at its
banquets during major social or diplomatic events. We wonder how that happened?
The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } - { WARNINGS & NOTES } - { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

For this chapter, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours.

Because the locale will be used a lot in the rest of the story, I have spent over 20 hours creating a blueprint for the Deeks house in Open Office Drawing to know where things are and how they are placed. It was a fun process, but not something to do with every bit of real estate given how time consuming it is.

This is a very long chapter, over 55,000 words or around 84 pages; have a coffee and snacks on hand while reading if you do it in one sitting.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

SEVENTH CHAPTER; Kill! Maim! Kill! Rape! Kill!
Special Supervisory Agent (SSA) Albert Isaacs of the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) was not in a good mood anymore. It was bad enough that he had to work on a Saturday morning, but that it was the last Saturday before Christmas annoyed him even more. But that was the life; when you work in policing and counter-terrorism, you learn the very first week that criminals and foreign enemies don’t take holidays, especially not those in your culture. On the other hand, he couldn’t blame the little guy he was meeting with. The international mess in progress wasn’t his fault, and this meeting had been planned over 30 hours ago, when he first set foot in the country.

Isaacs’ superiors at the CSIS regional office had decided that a mid-level SSA was sufficient to connect with the teenager, shake his hand, offer their services for protection, and make certain that The World Bank’s darling cyberneticist doesn’t get kidnapped or attacked and damaged beyond capacity to work his virtual miracles. Quite honestly, Albert didn’t think that his bosses had taken seriously the status or importance the kid had in the eyes of many people, especially his medical capacities after the way he woke up a coma patient in Stanford a month ago. Nor had the high bosses understood just what the rich, well equipped teenager could do in his own defense, despite the fact that ‘Wise Apothecary & Chemists’ had been on several watch-lists for almost 9 decades due to its innumerable suspicious movements of medical equipments, exotic chemicals and live biological reagents. Then too, his own creation ‘Wolenbahn Electronics’ had raised urgent red flags with the cyber-crimes divisions of CSIS, the RCMP and the Canadian Military’s cyberwar division in the last two years, since his father almost crippled him.

Coughing nervously to hide the true depth of his discomfort from the people in the dining room around him, SSA Isaacs leafed through the printed pages of the police report and the matching paramedic report. The images printed out from the Daleminton’s security cameras in the lobby showed a clear case of self-defense so that was ‘case closed’ as a recommendation from everybody who looked at it. The case of the ‘fake cop’ who came afterward was even cleaner since the crud was still alive and breathing, already in the depths of RCMP custody downtown. With a live perp in hand, nobody was going to press charges against a fully licensed pharmacologist / psychiatrist for having sedatives on his person to help get somebody in crisis back under control, thus making it also a dead-end. All that was left was the interrogation of the criminal, but they already had the answers, so it didn’t matter anymore.

Soft noises came from the end of the glass table near the cheerfully blazing wood stove as the adolescent prodigy shifted his weight in his chair as he tried to make the pain in his legs subside without recourse to more chemical medications before dinner. The boy had just sat himself sideways, facing towards the asian man besides him, and elongated his legs to rub his thighs and calves to massage the cramping muscles. Mister Ken Izu Tah had arrived at 11:15am with his colleague Mister Joseph Mercy Aylmer, attorneys at law, and taken over the proceedings with the alacrity of their profession. Not that much was happening besides teenaged grumblings and a thick, tall wall being raised, stone by bloody stone, around the clearly upset, defensive boy’s mind and secrets. Albert had arrived at 10:20am and been very successfully blockaded by the kid himself, unlike most adult criminals who tried all the time but couldn’t actually manage it. Whoever thought teaching psychiatry
and psychology to this kid was a good idea needed their head examined, fast! And not by the boy, since he wasn't normal to begin with! Also, where in tarnation did the brat find the time to learn about laws and police procedures, anyways?

Was he addicted to bloody 'Law & Order', 'Crossing Jordan' or 'Rizzoli & Isles' or something...?

Well, no matter. Now that the lawyers - because yes, there were several! - were involved, any chance to get an easy, clear answer went out the door. And the kid had both a criminalist and a contract experts on retainer, as well as the entire legal team of WAC's back in Buffalo in New York State. He had received an email on his cellphone a few minutes ago, to warn him of just how big and well financed the young male's defense team was. His mother's law firm in Buffalo was only one third the size of Wise Apothecary's litigation department, and had less than one twelfth of the financial assets. Taking Lucas face-on in an open court battle was not something his supervisors wanted; the tribunal fees alone could drain their budget enough to jeopardize several investigations scheduled for 2021. The best bet they had was the long-shot play; try to be polite and tolerant enough with the kid's very understandable anger and lack of patience in such a way that it made him feel like opening up a bit.

Yeah... When all else fails, pray real hard...

Albert was a father; his two sons were both 13 & 16 years old, so he could tell you from personal experience that teenagers were not made of pure patience and wholesome understanding, not all the time by any means. However, this boy was breaking all the typical molds that kids were based on. He was above and beyond intelligent, more educated than three college professors rolled into one, and had enough creativity to make any sane human of any age afraid of the results should something bad enough trigger him into a state of burn-it-all rage. Canada, the North American Confederation, and the UEO at large were all lucky that the youth's usual motus operandi was to fold back into his own self, retreating to his own plot of land behind high walls, instead of attacking relentlessly with all the methods he could whelm into bloody warfare. There were rumors the kid had paid mercenaries to clean up problems since he had bought his big homestead in Buffalo, and symptoms of Dark Web manipulations since he reached Stanford have run rampant.

The dead body in the forensics van and the menial crud in RCMP custody both reminded him clearly that his unwilling host had little reason to collaborate, let alone give up secrets and personal thoughts.

Sigh! Well, he had to try something.

Faced with the stormy flint-blue gaze of the mysterious Doctor Wolenczak, the SSA was again taken aback by the intensity of the deep visceral rage he could see brewing inside the young man. When exactly will he have suffered so much that he no longer considered himself bound by the laws and morality of human society? Isaacs prayed silently that it didn't happen while he was in the same town to witness the event. Biochemists made frighteningly cruel opponents, with all the mutative reagents they tended to spray around. After another deep sigh, Albert set aside the paper reports from the police and ambulance drivers as they didn't say anything different than the CCTV recordings had shown.

"Doctor Wolenczak, thank you for welcoming me in your home." Albert started as he pointed at the empty coffee cup on the table besides the pile of reports. He had rarely had good coffee like this, even during meetings with the bigwigs at the British Columbia Parliament, when the ministers in charge of security and civil defense needed to be briefed. "I won't waste your time by reviewing the events of this morning. The municipal cops and RCMP have done their jobs admirably, and the CCTV systems have recorded everything that CSIS might need for its own archives. We will transmit the afferent reports to your lawyers here, in San Francisco and Buffalo by the end of Monday evening. Now though, if you don't mind, I have a few questions that I need to ask so that
my agency can decide how to best protect you during your stay in our country."

"Is that necessary? I did not believe that Doctor Wolenczak was under imminent or systematic threat from anyone on this territory. Have you received any indications or intel chatter to the contrary?"

Asked Mister Aylmer in his usual bland tone, accompanied by an equally bland smile.

"Humph!" Lucas gestured vaguely with his right hand dismissively. "He must mean what I sent their border guards and police agencies about the Khunestade Church in Tampa and the quatuor of mercenaries they were paid to send after my pasty white hide. Lawrence never did have any taste in what low-lives he hired." The boy took up his own coffee for a sip, since his brunch had been set back well beyond any reasonable delay. A gut full of pills did not in any ways constitute nourishment.

Isaacs made a vague gesture with his right hand, neither dismissive nor affirmative, before giving the standard non-answer in the domain of activity he worked in. "There is always chatter and rumors on the wires, and human intel coming out of DC these days is weird, like it's scrambled in a food processor before reaching us. We know that a lot of references to Doctor Wolenczak are concerning the case against his father and mother who were both arrested deep in the past night, and are on their ways to UEO territory, at New Cape Quest in Florida. We also know that some rumors coming out of the White House are making less and less sense, as if the people inside the 'box' have all been gagged, but not enough to keep the occasional grunt, or scream, from passing outwards through the filters. We have had confirmed that the entire policing & military apparatus of the USA has scaled up to full civilian defense standing and several terrorist attacks have happened on the eastern coast already. The american public news channels had them on display this morning for all to see. Beyond that, we have not seen targeted chatter about your client. But, given that he was on CNN International News yesterday evening and that was seen by a few BILLION people since, well, there's a lot of mentions about him suffusing the context of many conversations that we are following avidly."

An amused – "snort!" – emanated from the teenager as he stood from his chair to walk in circles between his seat and the bathroom door to try altering the blood flow in his legs to stop the cramps. Damned temperature was getting colder of late, and he just couldn't seem to get his lower limbs to stop aching or seizing hard on him at the worst moments. "You sound like a bunch of old grannies listening to their soap operas all day. I wonder if the taxpaying public knows just how much fun your job is?" The adolescent asked, truly amused despite his acerbic tones that hid his real feelings quite well.

"Well, it's a bit more involved than that. We do have operatives in the field risking their lives to get this intel; it's not just wiretaps and channel surfing from a plush office." The CSIS agent countered mildly, only getting a small, tight smirk in return from the adolescent 'person of interest'.

"I am well aware of what wired intel and human intel require and implicate, Agent Isaacs. I wouldn't have gotten so high in the hierarchy of suppliers for The World Bank or the UEO Fleet if I was just as blissfully ignorant of 'real world' necessities like the average civilian in the streets. I didn't manage to sell so many programs and computers to those kinds of people just because I'm cute and have dimples when I smile." the boy said while sending his way a radiant megawatt smile that shone like pure innocence made flesh.

Albert Isaacs had interrogated many dozens of people in his career, and he could tell by now that the kid's external façade would rarely show what was really inside of him at the time. The separation between his inner thoughts and outer shell was almost total; a terrifying skill to have as an adult, but to have developed it at such a young age... If the kid went into the intel community or organized crime, the country he lived in would go down the pipes fast. And God have mercy on them if he
went into elected politics; he could lie in front of the cameras and never get caught just because of his plastic-faced demeanor and utterly logical manipulation of facts and causal chains. Not to mention that the ability to smile so well that it transformed his whole face and even reached his eyes like that, like he really was honest and earnest in his expression... Yeah, this kid in politics... Or as a preacher in a church... No! Not good ideas! Keep the runt away from them!

"Regardless of your – awareness – of how the intel and policing communities work, I do believe that CSIS will be keeping somewhat closer tabs on you in the coming days. Just to be certain any other accidents like this morning don't happen anymore. We wouldn't want your refugee claims or investor immigrant processes to hit hurdles along the ways, would we? You have my card and the list of coordinates in case you need to speak with our regional office in Vancouver; make certain to call and ask for help, instead of plunging head-first into trouble. What you did today was on the outer limits of justifiable, and only then because nobody is particularly interested in asking questions, or having this aired out in public. The next guy you cut may have family or friends that disagree and won't let go of the case that easily." the spy said in serious warning tones.

The bland pseudo-innocent look he got in return made his blood run cold as he wondered how many men had given this kid warnings that they should have heeded themselves. If the police reports and NSA surveillance files on the kid were to be believed, he had personally killed over a dozen times and ordered / paid for close to a hundred deaths in the last six to seven years. Not that 99% of those were any more than Dark Web rumors; people who disappeared around the Wise Apothecary installations didn't tend to reappear later on, and the Wolenbahn workshops had rapidly acquired a similar reputation amongst the criminalized elements of society.

Mister Mercy asked in his urbane, cultivated tone "And what of our fake cop from earlier? What was his story? We weren't told yet. If you have that information already, I would appreciate being able to close the file before dinner."

shrugging, the CSIS agent answered dismissively. "It was a case of bad timing on our good Doctor's part. The hotel foreman he had just knifed was a small time hoodlum who used vacant rooms in the hotel to hold illegal gambling games, sell drugs or small arms and pimp out anybody in the biz. The young policeman who terrorized the hotel lobby was his partner-in-crime since high school. He had tried to attend the local police academy but was kicked out for psychological issues so he went through a private security guard training course but never actually worked in that. Since he still had all his police class books and references, he read and learned to walk & talk like a beat cop to intimidate perps into leaving the hotel complex as the reserved territory of the dead guy. He had the real uniform because he bought a couple of them before the academy kicked him out and revoked his student ID card & equipment permits. He was paid by the ex-foreman to patrol full-time as if he were a genuine cop to lend his muscles to any situation that may need it. When he heard his friend/boss got gutted, he came in ASAP and... Well, he lost it, panicked, and the rest is history."

Lucas waved a negligent hand at the spook, declaring, quite sure of himself, "He had an app on his smartphone to watch the hotel CCTV and comms real-time so he could come in at the right time without his top-dog having to make an actual call, because that just looks weak in front of the people you're trying to intimidate. That's how he saw me get into a meeting with his buddy then leave without any warning. He couldn't have come in just seconds after I knifed the bastard on a coincidence. He was coming in to 'muscle' me to submission because that's what cock-shakers like that do. Like damned dogs in heat, they always have to get others on their knees to smell at their ass to feel powerful. My father is the same way. So is my mother, come to think of it. So, the faux-cop was on standby, probably in a car outside that's kitted out to look like one of the phantom police cruisers that patrol highways to catch speeders and distracted drivers. He came into the hotel at need or patrolled around, bullying guests to keep himself occupied. Easy con job to figure out. I'm surprised the hotel management, or the real VPD, never got any complaints over the time this has
been happening."

"They did get complaints, but the guy was always gone when the investigators came and the dead perp switched the tapes out for ones of activity that didn't show the faker on the prowl. With an inside man rigging the CCTV and the physical proof, the town cops had a hard time getting their heads around the situation. They would have gotten them, eventually, just not that fast."

Mister Aylmer clarified "So, he was never an active duty policeman at all? He never served one single day in uniform with a badge? All he did was dress up to BS people into being afraid so they would leave in peace his 'capo' to sell his merchandise unchallenged?"

Albert nodded slowly, fiddling with his empty cup on the table. "Yeppp... Just an idiotic wannabe that got flushed out of the system before he could make a mess, but kept on going to make said mess anyways. He was never under the badge, so don't worry. The municipal cops won't want your client's head on a pike, and no charges of assaulting, or drugging, an officer or some such will be coming your way. None that could stick in court passed the most basic evidenciary proofing anyways."

"Why do I not feel any safer, despite all your assurances?" Lucas asked tartly. "Oh, yeah, it's because bitter painful experience from this morning and other times has taught me that shit always comes to my life in large batches, not small doses. Has the druggy bum's crew gotten arrested? Because if the other muscle and street sellers are still running around, then I will be needing police protection for several days."

Albert replied tonelessly "The beat cops and detectives are on it. With the head of the crew dead and his favorite minion behind bars, it won't take them long. Besides, the little stain-on-the-floor was already singing like a canary the moment his mouth unfroze. It seems that you managed to scare what few wits he was born with straight out through his pants when he pissed himself the moment he realized you could disembowel him too. You do seem to have a polarizing effect on people." the spy added with a smirk directed at the glaring teenager.

Mister Aylmer steepled his fingers in front of his chest, assuming a thoughtful pose, before saying in his bland tone; "If that is all, SSA Isaacs, I'm certain my client has other matters to arrange, like some shopping and tourism, as were his primary plans for the day before all this happened. Please don't feel as if we are keeping you here. I'm confident that any further reports or paperwork can be handled remotely through our respective secretaries and emails."

The juvenile medic snorted in amusement before tapping his cane on the carpeted section of floor where he stood. "Go ahead, be dismissive of the man more openly, Joseph. I don't think he got your subtle hint the first time around." Snort! "Lawyers! They think everything they say is so high class and subtle and full of nuances..."

Agent Isaacs agreed with the sentiment but prudently kept his peace on the subject. He did have another target in mind, though. Sitting back into his chair comfortably, he took the time to look over the principal subject of the moment. Lucas Wolenczak had changed out of his soiled brown clothes as they were now in VPD evidence bags with his boots, but not any of the accessories as those had been deemed 'necessary for self defense – as shown' and thus his lawyers got the cops to back off. The VPD chief was sure to give them a call about that, so would the RCMP, but that wasn't his problem. The boy was now showered clean, wearing dark purple jeans, a dark blue turtleneck T-shirt and checkered flannel shirt over that with black sneakers that obviously weren't winterized. Those were probably his in-house clothing that he fell-back on when the city police pressured him into changing. It was visible by the bracers on his forearms and the sheaths at his waist that he had kept all his tools and weapons at hand, regardless of whatever the beat cops had said.
Being aware that Wolenczak was a tough nut to crack alone, and incredibly refractive when lawyered up, agent Isaacs decided to take a chance anyways. Maybe by fishing a bit, he could get some informations that CSIS otherwise couldn't lay hands on. "If you have a moment, my good doctor, I do have a few separate questions that my agency would like to see cleared out before we can give a formal recommendation to Ottawa on your migratory process." He then gave his most shark-like smile he could, since he was certain that politeness and the gentle approach wouldn't get him any further, not in the subjects he would broach next.

The teenager gave a one-shouldered shrug of disinterest. "Talk to my lawyers. They're big enough and well paid enough that you shouldn't be able to bypass them." the boy answered in neutral tones as he leaned on the pommel of his cane with both hands, affecting an air of someone well above the common man's concerns. Albert could see this was a manufactured façade, but so well crafted, and so experienced in its usage, that if he hadn't spent close to 25 years in the field for CSIS as a hum-int contact, he would have probably missed it.

"Thank you for your time then, doctor," the spy replied while totally ignoring the lawyers all the same. "I have a tablet here, if you could look at the short video playing on it?" SSA Isaacs set the film to play then turned the tablet the other way so that the two adults and their client could watch easily.

The film was taken by a mobile camera that was hovering on the side of a large roadway between trees at a weird angle: drone surveillance records. It showed a big, very long, dark shiny black tractor-trailer semi-truck composed of 3 wheeled modules and 2 motorized box-backed drive cabins, one drive at each end, with all five segments attached by accordion joints. The scene was happening on a stretch of paved road with snow and pine trees around it, in early morning light. The 'convoy' vehicle passed under a green overhead traffic board that said clearly "Columbia Avenue junction; Crownest Highway / BC Highway 3; west direction/Vancouver; east direction/Alberta". Not only was a 'road train' like this extremely rare on canadian streets, it was even more rare in the mountainous roads and cliffs of British Columbia where even a regular tractor-trailer truck would need a very good driver to operate. This beast was nowhere near an amateur toy; the sheer wheelbase width & height showed it was built to haul bulk cargo over severely accidented terrain, and the size of the three cargo boxes, plus the fact even the drive cabins had boxed backs instead of just the small driver's bunk housing...

The two lawyers exchanged looks for a second and pushed the tablet back towards the secret agent with matching discrete smirks. "There are no visual indicators of either manufacturing nor ownership on that vehicle. Why exactly did you ask OUR client about it? He's an expert at cybernetics and medical devices and drugs, not automotive conception." spoke Mister Tah in his usual clear clipped words.

The CSIS agent tapped the tablet to switch videos and showed it to the three on the other side of the table. "Maybe because of this? Isn't this an exactly similar vehicle leaving the railroad triage yard of the Wise Apothecary and Chemists production facility at Sault-Sainte-Marie in Ontario just four weeks ago? And by the license plate number, linking it to a 'dummy' shell corporation founded and operated out of the Canadian Maritime Provinces in Nova Scotia, itself a division of another shell based in Germany... Well, it does seem to be the same 'phantom' vehicle that has traveled all the way around the Great Lakes' northern shorelines, made a pit stop in Thunderbay where another WAC's complex is located, and now it seems to be rolling its way towards its owner at 45 miles an hour on our scenic back-country roads. Would you care to comment, my dear doctor Wolenczak?"

Lucas replied sarcastically "Was there a question in there? And why are you addressing me when my lawyers are in the room? Especially when I distinctly remember having formally directed you to speak with them, instead of bothering me?"
Other than that short, deadpan reply, the young man seemed completely unmoved by CSIS having filmed his convoy moving about. Albert wondered if maybe the next tidbit would get a reaction?

"So, I gather then that these three other similar vehicles, with different license plates, presently driving around randomly in New Brunswick near Moncton on the sea coast, Quebec's Laval Island area, and the last in the outer perimeter of Winnipeg in Manitoba, are not any business of yours? So you won't mind if we arrest, search and impound them?"

The teen smiled widely as he replied "Arrest, search and impound on what grounds, I would reply quite happily, if my lawyers weren't in the room to do it for me."

Mister Tah sneered at the CSI agent before killing his inquiry harshly; "If your employers had bothered to supply you with information that was either validated or the least little bit researched before it was used, you would already know that these vehicles are road-legal since 2016 and have been rolling around the USA, Canada, Mexico and even New Cape Quest since then. The paperwork for the DMV vetting of the mechanics involved is on record at that 'dummy shell corporation' you spoke of earlier and would answer your questions clearly, if you only bothered to read the forms. Is there anything else that we can disabuse you of, before your departure?"

Albert frowned at getting shot down so hard by a kid, but he couldn't gainsay him without looking like an idiot. Yes, the forms were on record and he already saw them, thank you very much. He was an experienced pro, he did his due diligence before questioning the persons involved. This had only been a fishing expedition anyways; the huge trucks were listed as specialty climate-controlled haulers of medical drugs and tools optimized for serving remote, off-roads communities. They did do that, visit remote less urbanized regions, occasionally, but their traveling patterns had them sticking close to heavy population centers, not handing out drugs in the back-country farming villages. The people at the regional office wanted an answer, but the normal method of stopping the truck for a search would get this little ragamuffin upset, which in turn would anger The World Bank, ergo, no stop-&-frisk for these roadway behemoths.

Later, maybe, if the USA did catch fire...

Standing up as he recovered his tablet and paper files into his briefcase, the agent nodded at them and left the suite without further comments. He had a lengthy report to write and a hidden body cam's recordings to dump in the server for his bosses to view.

{ SQ } - { Meh! What a day! } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 15:30pm)

(Western America; 12:30pm - noon)

Sigh! Finally alone!

Lucas was in a piss-poor mood by now.

The damned lawyers had left to go at the Vancouver Police Department central station to pursue the case and make sure it was completely closed, regardless of the many irregularities some of the uniformed men had done to Lucas during the preliminary investigation in the lobby. Then they would go to the RCMP city offices for the same reason. The CSIS could not be helped at this time by anybody, unless they themselves decided to court Lucas more openly by offering 'little gifts' that just might be worth accepting in exchange for his freedom and peace of mind from the vindictive bastards at the VPD.
Atop everything else, he had lost his one set of good, presentable business clothes he had brought with him on the train along his trench coat, gloves, scarf and fedora all in one fell swoop. He was also quite certain it hadn't been necessary, but the big fat smirks on some of the town cops' faces told a story all of their own. He may have been 'in the right' BUT he had just blown wide open, and in full view of dozens of smartphones that were recording, a story about how they had failed for several years to spot a fake cop preying around their city despite several complaints being filed. He was thusly by default 'in the wrong' no matter what the other facts of the case were.

He dodged criminal charges and a court case because of his political connections and future usefulness to the Canadian Government, not because it was legitimate self-defense. The types of weapons he had used essentially precluded that justification under current laws if he was brought to a judge. It would take an intervention from the Minister of Justice, at either provincial or federal levels, to stop that from happening next time around, no matter if his life had been in danger. Unfortunately, Canada's weapons laws were far more restrictive than the USA and they favored the police and prosecutors at every turn unless you had special dispensations already in hand before the mess occurred.

Then the damned VPD cops pretty much said he should have let himself get beat up "like a good little kid" and THEN called for help after the facts. Since he had a body camera active at the time, one VPD lieutenant, rather eager to shut down any questions about the paralyzed faker on the floor, had tried to push for arrest & charges under the claim that Lucas had in fact 'alternative' methods to violence, and thus was in truth guilty of premeditated murder and ambushing the false policeman. It was only the groans of stupor from the RCMP officers standing around them, and the fact that he was told anew that his idiotic attempts were being filmed straight to Facebook by several dozen cellphones, that he relented this tactic. But he didn't let go; he instead switched over to insisting on ripping all the bloodied clothes off the teenager then-and-there. He clearly wanted to try to at least shame him publicly with enforced nudity, and maybe manage to steal his possessions like his keys and wallet, to make things all around worse for the boy any ways he could.

The ploy was so damned transparent that many people, including hotel manager Lucarno, called him out on it, forcing the RCMP and other VPD officers to step in to limit the aggressive bully's depredations on Lucas. They did not however step in all the way, miserable losers and cowards that they were.

Yes, the bastard managed to have Lucas undress completely right in the hotel lobby, but with hotel employees holding some beach towels to form a screen around him, all so the mulish VPD lieutenant could collect his 'evidence' before Lucas went and destroyed or modified it. The middle-aged crud had the audacity to try to make Lucas change clothes without any shielding whatsoever supposedly to "inspect & control the evidentiary process". In reality, it was to truly expose the teen to public ridicule as much as possible. Lucas knew that all these scenes had been filmed by many civilian smartphones plus the hotel CCTV; he already got those, plus the film of his own camera, into the hands of his attorneys to lay charges against each of the deviant bastards who did this to him.

Then the dumb VPD brute had the gall to start a pissing match with the ranking RCMP team leader when the older man called him out on his depraved twisting of police procedures. Although, he seemed more peeved that the lout had done so in public, where everybody now had proof that it did happen to those the beat cops didn't like all that much. In point of fact, the bloody RCMP sergeant then made it clear openly to Lucas that he would have just loooved to get the teenager into a dark dank cell over the weekend, just to show him that the Mounties weren't afraid of planetary politics or The World Bank's associated partners. The two rutting bulls with badges then got so deep into their own shite that the whole manly-man contest of ballsiness was stopped only by the simultaneous arrivals of the CBC news crew and the CSIS agent whose badge outranked them all.
And wasn't that a damned fine mess in and of itself! The bloody fucking canadian secret services were after his pasty hide now! The worse part in all this was that his only real lucky break today was CSIS getting involved so soon at the start of the problem.

Sitting to rub his temples, Lucas realized he couldn't really go out to shop since he would probably have a plain-clothes police tail following him all over the place, waiting for a situation to commit a brutal arrest of him, even if he were 'in the right' again. The VPD had egg on their face and they thought they had the guilty party on the radar. The fact it was all their fault to begin with was never taken into consideration, not when they could instead blame the foreign kid who was all alone against the world, and nobody would come to help.

Even his lawyers seemed to be rethinking taking on his business. The conclusion he was fast coming to wasn't reassuring, but it was the only logical one he had. He had to leave Vancouver fast, and Canada as a whole if he could manage it. That unexplored manor at Shell Creek, in Edmonds near Seattle, seemed a much better option now, especially given just how permissive the self-defense laws in the USA were compared to Canada.

The adolescent's stomach chose that moment to growl angrily at the fact it was empty and unsustained since 08:00am this morning. That small muffin he had eaten with his pills was a long way back and he was in danger of both acid reflux and a malnourishment migraine if he didn't eat fast. Just as he was about to take the wired tablet from the middle of the dining room table to call in a meal, somebody knocked on his suite door loudly. Swiping the room service menu aside in favor of the security app, he checked the person in front of his door. It was manager Lucarno and the elderly asin manager Ohyun so he decided to buzz them in to listen to what they had to say.

{ SQ } - { True northern hospitality } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 15:37pm)

(Western America; 12:47pm)

The two elderly female managers were soon sitting at the dining room table as Lucas brought over a freshly brewed carafe of coffee and a plate of small muffins, cupcakes and cookies, to place in the middle of the table for all to serve themselves. He may not receive people often but he had hosted business meetings in the past, and he did have good manners when he wasn't being attacked. This would also give him an excuse to put some solid stuff in his stomach to sponge off the acid thus allowing him to set back his real meal by another two hours if necessary.

The women stayed silent as the young man moved painfully on stiff legs to place the necessities of hospitality on the table for them. His insistence on good manners and comportment despite the fact he had been the main victim, and lived a terrible ordeal at the hands of the police on top of things, just made it even more vital for them to act properly towards him. He hadn't deserved any of what happened this morning and it was all worsening the situation that had forced him to move out of the USA and his real home. The two managers exchanged a look, renewing their commitment to do right by this young man.

Madam Ohyun having been his primary contact in the hotel, she started the conversation to establish a more normalized tone and, hopefully, open a way for Madam Lucarno to speak her offer to set things right with their most important client of the 2020 season.

"Thank you, doctor Wolenczak for receiving us in your home." Madam Ohyun began in her normal soft tones. "We wish to express our deepest sympathies for the trauma and inconveniences you suffered this morning inside our establishment. We give you our utmost assurances that this is not the way that Daleminton conducts business on a regular day. Severe changes have been carried out to
guarantee it does not happen again. Senior manager Leland Lambert has been given extended medical leave to tend his family during their mourning, but, we are taking the period to conduct an internal review of his activities to make certain he was not complicit of his son's actions."

The adolescent was busy swallowing a bite of oatmeal muffin so he nodded at her, gesturing with the left hand that held the metal thermal mug to continue without waiting for a verbal response. The woman understood the situation, smiling at him to signify she wasn't insulted by his prioritizing his food over words.

"Now, we have some concerns about the events we saw this morning, therefore we have directed the hotel lawyers to contact yours to assist in your complaints against the acts of police brutality we witnessed. You can rest assured we will be writing up our testimonies and forwarding them to the appropriate authorities to make sure this does not happen again. Please do note however, that corruption and ill-management in the Vancouver Police Department is somewhat removed from our chain of management; there is only so much we can actually do."

The answering snort and smirk from the teenager reassured them he understood that situation perfectly and didn't hold it against them in any ways. Madam Lucarno took the moment to step into the flow of conversation. It wouldn't get any better anyways, might as well take a chance.

"For my part, as the general manager of the complex, I am appalled at the clear lack of respect and solicitude that were shown to you by members of our staff. Then you were forced to disrobe in public and practically molested by the VPD officers right in front of me... Well, I can't change the past, but I can help the future a bit. At 13:00pm a service cart filled a buffet of dinner items will be delivered so you can enjoy a filling, relaxing meal in private without being exposed to public scrutiny any further for the day. I remembered that when we planned the meeting, you had wanted to sign the papers for the other two suites then go for brunch at the local shopping mall, to walk around a bit. I thought that bringing the hot food to you would be a good alternative at present."

The young medical specialist was looking at both women with wide eyes and tightly closed mouth, hands firmly holding onto his mug and cane pommel to keep them from shaking, as if he wasn't used to getting any sorts of apologies, let alone compensation or help, when things got bad. Given what had been said in the news channels about his parents and childhood since yesterday, the women were pretty certain they were part of the limited select group of people who actually did right by him when he was the aggrieved party.

"Also, I have heard what you said to the policemen who were taking your clothes as evidence, that you don't have any winter gear left, as you were traveling light with a plan of buying locally what was needed. I have spoken with the foreman of our general store, here inside the complex, to set up an emergency loan of boots, trench coat and accessories to kit you while you go out to buy your own choice of traveling clothes and snow gear." Making a vague gesture with her hand, Madam Lucarno added dismissively "And don't you worry about dry cleaning them when you're finished; we'll take care of that in our laundry service ourselves. For that matter, I have arranged that one of our courtesy cars and drivers be available to escort and assist you during your trip to the stores, when you are ready."

Lucas was keeping his mouth firmly shut. The mix of emotions churning away wildly inside of him was not something he was used to. Anger, rage, hate, shame, embarrassment, vengefulness and other negative or violent feelings he could handle instinctively as he had dealt with them since being born and known little else in his life. Positive feelings were almost always accidental and limited to internalized stuff like peace, contentment, restfulness or just plain old satisfaction with a project finally finished and functional. Experiencing positive feelings because people were doing nice things for him out of a sense of 'Justice' or 'Altruism' was just not something he lived or expected, not for
him, not after a decade and a half of being the piss-pot of his parents and their ilk. Choked up on too many feelings conflicting with his thoughts, the youth adopted the neutral façade that was his default setting when dealing with stressful situations, nodding at the women in silence as he didn't trust his voice or his choice of words.

As if they understood what he was living through, both women made sad small smiles to encourage him to answer, but to no avail. Lucas was bunkering down inside his mind, deeply behind thick walls, and would probably take all night to come out of his emotional seclusion. The two managers decided to leave the young man to his peaceful retreat for the day, simply giving him the written letters for the clerks in the hotel's store, and the call card for the car & driver when he felt like moving around again. They got up to leave just as the tone for the door signified somebody at the door. A quick check on the monitor showed it was the buffet cart, arriving at 12:58pm sharp as expected. Manager Lucarno opened the door, guided the young server to place the cart properly then shooed herself and the other two out the door to allow their guest to recover in peace.

(Eastern America; 16:03pm)

(Western America; 13:03pm)

Now finally alone with his own thoughts and needs, the boy collapsed on the straight backed dining chair, bending forward to set his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. He stayed that way for several minutes, trying to regulate his breathing, trying to order the painful maelstrom inside his mind before giving it up as a bad job scrapped. His stomach growled again at the odors wafting gently from the buffet platters, reminding him of the most penultimately important task of all teenagers: feeding the Beast within.

Getting up on stiff legs, he hobbled over to the cart to inspect the platters, finding potatoes in fries, mashed and scalloped styles, pilaf rice, beef in London cut, small Greek kebabs, sliced pastrami and hamburger patties, chicken breasts in lemon & pepper sauce, spicy Italian sausages, fried bacon strips, several fillets of sole pan seared with butter, olive oil & herbs, a platter of meat raviolis with pots of bolognese and alfredo sauces, platters of hot steamed & cold pickled vegetables, and multiple salad greens to mix & match at his taste with four vinaigrettes and assorted toppings to choose from. Also included were metal pots of french canadian pea soup and minestrone soup, sliced white and rye breads, diverse cheeses, and pots of condiments to garnish what he prepared for himself. The cart's cold compartment held a few little niceties for dessert; three ice cream flavors, an orange curd & meringue pie, a tiramisu cake and a large Canadian style mocha, caramel & maple syrup deluxe yule log cake.

Smiling widely, the teenager decided that maybe, just maybe, the afternoon wouldn't end up being the total loss that the morning had been. "Alexa!" he called out, "Activate the dining room TV, set channel for CNN, the USA West Coast station." he asked as he set his cane against the cart to pick up a tray to load with warm, soothing food. A starter of pea soup and a small salad would be a good beginning, followed by a hearty mixed plate of chicken, fish and kebab with trimmings. Much later after that, he would cut himself a good sized piece of that yule log with a new mug of coffee to whittle away the afternoon with his computers. It was high time he unpacked the last two modules of the Cyberghast Hub to complete his networking capacity.

As the boy stacked his first course on his tray, the Internex screen activated, tuning to the CNN station he asked for. As he was mixing his diminutive appetizer salad, the channel broadcast a public announcement that a mandatory interruption of regular programming would occur at 17:00pm Washington DC time to give way to a public message from the US President himself. The message would be obligatorily broadcast on all television and radio channels, as well as several hundred websites. Auditors were then incited to either watch or record the program as it had been advertised
by the White House as 'writing history in the making' by the office of communications.

The adolescent shrugged it off, thinking that he would be sitting with his main course at that time and watching TV anyways, so why not? Seated at his favorite chair right next to the cheerily blazing wood stove, he twirled his soup slowly as he tapped the touchscreen to send the hotel porters an order to bring the remaining four wheeled modules of equipment to his suite within the hour. He would eat peacefully then take the rest of the day to set up for prolonged remote warfare against the mongrels in the Vancouver Police Department, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and CSIS who thought they could piss all over his life unpunished.

Lucas was not above hiring mercenaries and 'wanted men', so long as they were kept away from him physically and didn't have a clue who paid them through a chain of anonymous accounts or Western Union moneygrams taken from same-said accounts. It was time to arrange for some of these people of dubious livelihood to be brought into service to the Wise/Wolenczak powerbase.

During a joint mission, the NCIS and FBI in New Orleans had arrested a young black man, about 20 months back, a competent hacker who used the name 'Jackal' who had managed to evade law enforcement for close to 7 years before being caught. His vast experience of spywares, cryptolockers and ransom-wares would be useful in the short-term plans.

The FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) team had participated in arresting, jointly with an anti-terrorism task force in Hawaii, called 5-0 Brigade, another hacker but a middle-aged white male this time. Code-named 'Dermiculus', he specialized in stealing the identities of the people he murdered, then impersonated them to destroy the organizations they worked for, from the inside, with conventional non-electronic sabotages. For the mid-term and long-term plans against several churches linked together in promoting Trumpism, and maybe even a conservative think-tank or three, this type of slow tactic could work.

Those were just the two he could remember off the top of his head. There were of course the 'crazies', those who plied their craft for reasons that were too personal and emotional to be deemed 'sane', let alone 'reliable', to do business with. Money was not their motivator, so trying to pass a contract and hold them to it was an idiot's dream. If you empowered these guys, you had to clear the zone of all friendlies and leave it fallow for a decade afterwards to decontaminate the ground.

If the fucktards in DC wanted to go that way and push him to his last bastion, Lucas knew about the super-secret Glazia Krypta cryogenic prison in the high Arctic, under Canada's ice shelves, that the NAC had hidden there at the inception of the confederation. Maybe the prisoners would like to be released from their ice cells to see the sunlight again? Depending on what happened, it could be a logical option to make the USA waste their resources and attention on 'something' else than him.

Our ship is sinking

(NCIS - LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 15:30pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 12:30pm

NCIS west coast - Office of Special Projects

Los Angeles, California, USA

Marty Deeks was in a mood to break bones and enjoy doing it. The entire night since the declaration of the 'Noah's Ark' protocol had been one shitty mess after another bloody mess which had been
preceded by a long list of similarly bloody shites dropping on them from the sky, like a macabre parody of Heaven's manna in a 'Bizarro World' type of story.

Leaning backwards heavily into the backrest of his seat, the shaggy-haired blond male frowned angrily as he watched the streets, damaged cars, vandalized homes and burglarized shops pass by, with a dead body rotting in the sunny afternoon light occasionally dotting the riot-torn cityscape as the convoy drove by at the highest – safest – speed the narrow roadway allowed them to roll. Several cars were dumped hastily, and therefore not completely straight in their parking spaces, thus meaning they had about ¾ of a real traffic lane to roll in. Given the sizes of the pickups, SUV's and the armored 10-wheel box truck at the rear, they had to be careful not to scrape vehicles as they drove by or else they could cause a jam. At least, the armored convoy had little chance of stopping for a mechanical trouble or losing a part due to bumping a badly parked sedan. They were all too armored and solidly built to be bothered by something menial like that.

Sitting in the shotgun seat of the first pickup in front, Deeks looked around, watching the street sides, balconies, windows and roof line on the right flank of their procession. Kensi was sitting on his left, driving the vehicle and checking the left flank of their road as she rolled. The two women in the back banquette with duffel bags and M16's were picked up at an emergency retrieval of several NCIS personnel that had been under cover inside the navy's active ranks to investigate drug smuggling, data theft, sexual harassment of subordinates and several officers who had been using their position to inflict racial or religious diatribes unto their sailors. Their exfiltration had not been peaceful, as indicated by the cuts, bruises and bloody stains on the clothes of all agents. They left two dozen dead white-christian fanatics in their wake as they evacuated the retrieval point, with the fallen enemies' weapons, comms, and other gear the criminals had stolen from the navy yard getting stashed in their box truck for recycling into their own arsenal the moment they reached home base.

Each vehicle in the convoy had two to six such agents recovered at diverse emplacements along a lengthy, circuitous drive dedicated to alternatively picking up people and solid goods. They were now somewhat safe, heading back for debriefing at OSP and, maybe, a chance to reconnect with their family if they still lived. The two women behind him were hindi and asian; prime targets in this age when laws and decency were flushed down the crapper by white-power militias. Deeks reflexively tightened his grip on his M16 as he gazed balefully at the passing buildings, his acute blue eyes seeing subtle movements in the windows of residences. Sporadically, clearly perceptible shoppers could be seen moving fearfully around the crowded aisles of small neighborhood stores, some now with armed security guards at the doors. Many homes and shops they passed had put in place or were in the process of installing plywood sheets and pieces of scrap metal across their windows and doors to reinforce them against looters and lynch mobs.

Have a bloody merry fucking Christmas you too, USA!

No, Marty wasn't in a good mood. The night had been rough all around, with several armed excursions to run after and arrest white mongrels who deserted their posts with stolen weapons and classified data. Like the coast guard patrol routes for the LA commercial harbor. Or the transponder codes for several of the private passenger airports around the greater LA metro area. Or the whack-job who tried to run over Callen and Sam with the phat-assed piece of obsolete shit he stole from the motorpool at the navy base. A bloody Bradley fighting troop carrier! All 8 wheels, 75mm cannon turret, and hydraulic bulldozer blade of it, had rammed into the 2-door sports car Sam favored on mission, rolling over the low, crushed civilian car, and trying to run for it out of the base compound. It was the seamen on guard duty at the gates that used a 3’ recoilless rifle to slam a shell right in the driver's cupola that stopped the tank from driving on a rampage through town. That mission report call to Hetty hadn't gone nearly as well, but not as bad either, as it had been expected. She sent an already moving team to pick them up before they returned to base for their end-of-shift and sleep cycle; that was certainly better than trying a taxi in the kind of societal climate they had. Chances
were, the cabbie would take them somewhere lonely to have waiting friends kill the passengers for their wallets and cellphones. Or maybe gang-rape them first.

That was the sort of days they were facing now, and for a long time to come.

The despondent 35 year old looked sideways at his 32 year old fiancé, admiring her long black hair and tanned fair skin as she concentrated on driving them to the next mission point. He sighed deeply in relief as he thought of her and their family-to-be, feeling grateful that at least his mother Roberta Deeks, and Kensi's mom, Julia Feldman, had managed to reach their home last night without getting attacked. Now sheltered safely inside their house with a fortified basement and plentiful reserves, the two older women could endure quite a lot without need to get exposed outside the building. Except that beneficial situation would last only so long, without functioning stores to buy goods from, or contacts to farmsteads for renewable supplies. Plus, even if you could purchase anything, the transport/delivery would still be problematic at the end of it. Did you risk yourself to get fetch, or do you stay home and open the door to strangers?

He really hoped the unrest wouldn't last that long, but his gut was telling another story.

The comms system in the center console sounded off and a yellow light flashed, telling them it was the CB frequency receiving something. Hetty had used the combined knowledge of Eric Beale, Nell Jones and a handful of amateur radio buffs in the OSP to configure and install customized gear in all dedicated mission vehicles like this one over the passed 6 years. These comms sets could pick up old school CB, HAM-radio & short waves, along cell signals & satellite signals. Plus, they had programs in them to automatically decode/convert speech & text to Morse code or other ciphers. A flashing green light meant it was a message for one specific person, yellow was for the entire mission convoy and red would be an emergency all-call to everything under Hetty's jurisdiction. Since the coming message was for the entire convoy, it was probably a detour to pick up more people or extra stuff like food, fuel or tools...

Marty upped the sound on the comms as he picked up the wired handset to click the button on it to signal that he had an open line, that way Eric at OPS would get their 'okay' beep and check them as 'alive and working' on his master list of "all things going wrong today" as he called it. The message coming for the team was simple and direct; Operations had monitored LAPD chatter indicating that a pawn shop on the boulevard they were going to travel, on their return to OSP, had just been burglarized. According to unidentified civilians that fled the scene then called 9-1-1, the owners were reported killed in action, and two of the five perps had died as well. Nell had data-mined the Internex to get the low-down on the building and goods inside, thus the change of mission plans.

NCIS mission during an insurrection; "loot anything usable for immediate survival or barter".

He certainly wasn't acting under LAPD protocols, that was sure!

Then, of course, they still had to bring everything back to the compound. Apparently, their paychecks weren't gonna be checks for much longer. Rumor was the US Federal government was on the verge of being declared an 'illegal entity' by several banks, added to which the bozos in DC only wanted to pay the white crusaders who sucked off their dicks in public, ergo, they were about to be paid in food, tools, munitions and maybe a bit of raw metals or jewelry... That would be just like Hetty to go back to medieval management methods at the blink of an eye.

She was that old after all...

Upon hearing the orders, Kensi rolled her eyes, set her mouth into a tight, unforgiving line, then flashed both turn signal lights on their pickup to show the others she had the mission orders and would guide them there. Seconds later they received similar flashes down the convoy and changed
speed to clear this meandering neighborhood faster. An empty pawn shop was like a free-serve buffet at a church bingo game; everybody would want some, including the guys who never attended mass. They had to get there before anybody else to pick it clean, especially the weapons lockers that these stores inevitably had, plus any food, tools, clothing and money, gems, metals and such that could be loaded into, or packed atop, the convoy's four vehicles.

\{ SQ \} - \{ This country is sick \} - \{ SQ \}

(Eastern America; 15:39pm)

(Western America; 12:39pm)

Marty knew the job would go badly the moment he heard Eric's strained, worried voice in the team's earbuds telling them that all the cameras in the entire city block were dead because somebody had the genial idea to destroy the transformers mounted on the utilities poles in the alley behind the shops and residential buildings. Their comms worked because of the military-grade signal repeaters & boosters in their vehicles in a manner completely independent from municipal power and utilities. The fact that most cell towers around metro LA still worked was miraculous, and the fact the Pentagon had not shut down the GPS network access to those 'not faithful enough to the New Order' was even more odd, and not to be relied upon. That meant of course they had no eyes inside the shops or nearby, no lights, no air conditioners, and probably no phones either, since most stores used complicated computerized telephony systems with wireless handsets so they could move around to verify inventory or watch suspicious clients. Not that cameras and phones would do you any good in the current conditions that were swamping Los Angeles.

Kensi shut down the engine then got out with her rifle, motioning the two women out of the pickup's cabin to task them properly. One would sit at the wheel, ready to drive off urgently, the other would stand guard with her rifle so they had better chances to react properly if they were attacked. Sending the truck on the run would hurt, but not anywhere near as much as getting the entire team completely stuck here and losing that many people all at once. Three agents they knew in a friendly way, if not closely, had died during the first night of civil unrest to sweep the city. Two more were abed in the OSP compound's infirmary with minor injuries, just needing a day or two for the stitches to close correctly and insure no infection set in. If that was the rate at which they lost people, their little family wouldn't make it to New Year's Eve alive.

Marty got out on his side of the truck, assault rifle in hands, as he swept with his eyes the bay windows of the buildings lining both sides of the formerly peaceful neighborhood's short commercial boulevard then turned towards the convoy to make certain they were also affecting men defensively. Once all the crew delegated to the in-store job were assembled on the sidewalk with their weapons ready, he made hand codes that had them all activate the flashlights mounted under the barrels of their rifles and then those set on either side of the tactical goggles they all wore as part of their body armor kit. Now having reliable lights, Deeks went into the store's damaged open doors, starting the process of clearing out any remaining hostiles so they could loot the place dry to insure a measure of longevity to their own families and law-keeping operations during the clearly happening civil war.

The first few feet inside weren't that bad given the sunlight streaming in by the large bay windows at the front of the shop's showroom. Marty quickly spotted the cadavers of the two owners and their adult daughter clustered at the foot of the glass counter with the old National mechanical cash register from the 1920's, right at the front of the store. They were all placed in a way that suggested they had been put on their knees before being shot in the head with a shotgun. From the front. With their eyes opened. The backs of their heads had exploded, scattering soppy wet red goo all over the floor and furniture, shattering the counter and sullying the contents within with shrapnel of lead and ruined flesh.
They were knocked around, beaten mercilessly to submission.

They were bound with duct tape.

They were forced to kneel like slaves inside their own home and livelihood.

They each saw the blast coming at their forehead.

And why? Because they were immigrants come to America thirty years ago when they fled the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, trying to find peace away from communist rule. They had. For a while, they had found that precious peace. But now, someone had judged them unworthy to be complete citizens with full rights just because of their skin color, then unworthy to live because of their religion.

Marty felt sick to his stomach at the sight, and comprehension of its meaning, but clamped his mouth shut tighter than a mausoleum vault, desperate to hold in the acidic vomit that would spew forth if he let out the scream of all-burning rage that wanted to escape from deep in his gut. Closing his eyes for a few seconds, he heard his colleagues enter and spread around the ground floor of the building, gladly leaving to him the grim task of investigating the grisly killings up front. Kensi came to stand besides him, closing her eyes in a silent prayer of her own for a few seconds too, before they exchanged a glance filled with meanings and emotions they both understood full well.

They needed to talk about their future when they reached OSP after this.

The men from the box truck came towards them, pushing a flatbed 4-wheeled dolly stacked with some metal wire hand-baskets they had found in the back-store. Placing that kit ten feet from the front entry, they started to look at what could be recovered according to the priority list of survival.

Firstly; foodstuffs; with specific attention to perishables as the stores in town were quickly running out as the supply chain broke down. Besides that, all canned, pickled or dehydrated goods were to be taken.

Secondly; firearms and munitions; regardless of epoch or condition. A crossbow or flintlock musket could be used by an insurgent to kill their people just as much as an AR-15. That meant all swords, maces, halberds, daggers, hunter's knives and weird fantasy blades too. Even if they didn't use them, it was important to deny potential rebels or militias their use. If necessary, they could use the tools in the compound to melt the metals and forge new, more adapted tools or weapons as needed.

Thirdly, Hetty asked for solar panels; any sun-powered devices they could find and also all batteries of any kind, shape or size, especially the rechargeable sorts. The goal was to create a system of solar collection on the roofs of the OSP building and all over the internal enclosed courtyard to power their comms, climate control and laboratory equipments, especially the infirmary.

Fourthly; steam powered engines; these would be antique industrial machines but there was a very profitable collector's market for them. Several of these devices could generate mechanical movement, or pressurize air or water, and so could be connected to the same tools as those of a garage or Dremmel style rotary devices. Also, they might even be able to take such a steam engine to create an electrical generator to run at night when the solar array would be useless.

Fifthly; all medical supplies; brand new if possible, but even a domestic kit that was open and partially used is better than nothing, or worse, leaving it to rot in a ruined building.

Sixthly; purpose-built camping or survival items, including sleeping bags, tents, hammocks, emergency backpack stoves, walking sticks, bad weather ponchos and coats, road flares, glowsticks,
Candles and any combustible fuel, etc...

And after that, anything that they thought could be useful like bolts of cloth or leather; ropes, twine and thread; chains, hooks, pulleys and hoists; lumber or workable wood pieces; manual tools sets to bolster their production of general items and renovations to the compound and car repair capacity, etc...

Recovering the money and trade valuables was on Kensi's shoulders since she was the senior full-time NCIS agent in the convoy. Marty was still the LAPD liaison officer, and therefore he was practically never considered in hierarchy questions. Unless like a few minutes ago, when they breached the building. For cases like that, he was the best choice to go first, as Kensi was a much better shot at long range, so making her watch the street then come in last was clearly logical. Marty stood guard, actively looking around for booby traps or dangerous items lying around as Kensi walked around the damaged glass counter to see what was left of the store owners’ money.

The young woman cursed foully under her breath as she saw that the ancient mechanical cash register had been bashed in, jamming the drawer closed, during a patently amateurish try at a bash-&-grab. Pulling the small crow bar out of the loops on her backpack straps, she rudely stuck the straight claw into the ajar space between the drawer and the machine, giving the bar's curved side a few whacks to push it in enough to then use her shoulder to slam forward against the lever, popping the drawer open without further effort. Carefully, she set the crowbar back in its loops securely, since losing it in these conditions was just asking for an enemy to grab it and bash her head with it. With a self-loathing sigh of despair, she motioned one of the NCIS agents to bring her all the aluminum briefcases on the display set that locked with keys instead of a combination system. She explained that she wanted all the collectible money bills, stamps, coins and every piece of jewelry packed into the briefcases then put in the box truck under armed guard. Accepting the first briefcase from the male coworker, she turned to the despicable task of emptying the cash register, then kneeling on the bloodied sickening floor, to search inside the counters and shelves for more currency, jewelry, and tradable wealth.

(Eastern America; 15:48pm)

(Western America; 12:48pm)

Marty put his hand to his earbud as he listened to the report of the two-man team that went at the back to check out the enclosed 2-car garage and delivery bay, then down the secondary staircase to the basement warehouse. Moving around the wrecked showroom, he looked towards the open doorway that accessed the main staircase. There were supposed to be two apartments used by the owners. Nell's briefing said there was an office / workshop on the first floor, the actual living space on the second floor with a flat rooftop terrace. Squinting his eyes, Deeks thought he saw some shadows moving at a weird angle in the stairs, so he stepped forward to shine his rifle's light towards it, thus getting a clear view.

What he saw was the dull glint off a small metal object followed by a single loud popping noise, a red flash and the scream of pain from the guy piling up jewelry in the briefcases besides Kensi. Acting on raw combat instinct and adrenaline, the detective knelt behind the nearest shelving unit on his left side, and let loose a short salvo of 5 shells at about the height of the enemy muzzle flash, but he aimed right through the thin gypsum drywall panels to make certain he was shooting in the perp's line of retreat. Marty was rewarded by a loud scream of pain and a slight weight tumbling down the stairs back towards the ground floor landing.

Giving himself a boost with his back foot, he sprinted towards the open staircase doorway to shine his light in the face of his opponent, only to freeze hard at the sight of the atrocity in front of him.
It was a small, very young girl.

Prepubescent girl.

Like, between 7 and 9 years old, little baby girl. She had lily white skin, green eyes and light brown hair in a messy, partly undone braid coming down her back to her shoulders. She wore blue jeans that had been good and clean, sometime ago, and a button down shirt in a tone of clear green that matched her eyes. The childish flower print on her jeans and bow at the end of her braid contrasted badly with the bloodied soles under her small canvas shoes and the small 2-shot Derringer pistol still smoking in her right hand, showing clearly who the ambush shooter had been.

The little child looked at Martin Deeks right in the eyes, as she lay dying from 3 gun shot wounds to the abdomen. "Nigger lover!" She spat as venomously as her fading body allowed her to. "I see'ed you's with 'em brown cows outside! You won't get me! I won't be made to serve slaves! I was born'ed to lead! My pa said so! In Jesus my Lord, I believe and pray!" She finished feebly as the catastrophic gut injury bled her to death under 30 seconds.

Deeks didn't know how long he stood there, watching the cooling corpse of the small, racist, religiously brain-washed baby, as she lay in the pool of her own blood, with the soles of her shoes pointed towards him. Soles stained with the blood of the people her parents had killed right in front of her childish eyes, in a xenophobic rampage that caused their own deaths too, and orphaned their baby just long enough for her to cause evil and be killed in her turn. Marty didn't even realize he'd begun crying until Kensi put a supporting hand on his shoulder to help anchor him back to reality. He felt the wet tear tracks on his face at the same moment he saw those running down his fiancé's own face, her features mirroring the same horror he knew now dwelt in his.

Looking around, he saw that their wounded man had been taken out to the convoy for medical assistance. At first look, it was just a muscle wound on the inside of the left forearm. The girl had aimed at his chest but he was moving too much, she was too much of a novice with the pistol and, really, it was a Derringer like Hetty carried around everyday on a wrist-rig. Those things were never meant to have any punching power or precision passed 10 feet in a straight line; the kid shot at an angle, in bad light, at a moving target. It was more of a miracle she had managed to hit the man than seeing the injury was mostly skin, flesh and a bit of meat. He would have a scar on that arm for the rest of his life, but no real consequences to his health beyond the cosmetic.

Now shaken badly by events, Deeks told the sweep team in the basement to go up the floors with their guns at the ready and not hesitate to shoot at ANYTHING that showed up if it was pointing a weapon towards them. The clipped "Roger that, leader 2" without requests for justifications confirmed to him that the whole convoy was aware and understood they were no longer playing by the rules of polite society anymore. This was now like the Middle-East, in the towns scrapped and burned by ISIS as they were taken out and removed; anything that moved was either one of your men or a hostile, no in-between anymore.

The return to NCIS compound was dreary and silent. Nobody said anything that wasn't in strictest necessity for survival or choosing what to take. A quick search of the dead bodies had showed clear evidence that the child Deeks killed was the daughter of the two racist adults who died during the burglary. The other two suspects were in the wind, and they had no clues as to who they were, or what kinship to the fanatic family they may have had. What was clear though, was that both parents had been shot in the back at kidney height with a shotgun, similar to what had killed the shopkeepers. Given how often religious fanatics and racist militiamen beat their kids, the NCIS agents came to the conclusion that the adults' other children, teenagers maybe, had seen how easy it was to kill and taken a chance at freedom from parental and cult violence when it was presented to them. The fact the smallest of the family was abandoned wasn't all that surprising. In cases of familial...
implosion, it was normally everybody for themselves, and each child went their own way, never looking back.

In an act that all the convoy agents thought was as calamitous as depraved, the NCIS team had cut short its mission after that. They did end up taking the store's Ford Econoline that had been used for deliveries to augment their overall mobility and cargo capacity, then packed roughly anything of interest at first or second glance. They precipitously left the derelict shop, not bothering with placing the bodies in the basement or any rites, words, or anything. In one last act of inhumane disregard forced on them by civil war and time constraints, the poor innocent family would lay and rot on the open floor, with the corpses of their murderers around them, sharing the wide grungy smear of drying blood for eternity.

After 40 minutes of rough driving, they entered the heavily guarded underground parking structure, under the baleful gaze of the new soldiers that had joined their ranks. These volunteers, mostly men of races other than white and plenty of women from all ranks and jobs, abandoned their postings as they knew they were now at the mercy of bigots, sexual predators, or Trump's crusaders. Once in their assigned parking spaces, including the new van, they all marched into the building's main center space to see the show.

{ SQ } - { I don't fight for this bastard } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 16:47pm)

(Western America; 13:47pm)

Hetty had insisted on planning all outings and errands to stop in time to bring all her operatives inside the walls by the time it would be 10 minutes to 5 on Washington DC's clock. It had been announced rather forcibly by the White House that the president would make a public statement about the week's judicial events that would be mandatorily broadcast on all channels just before dinner.

And so here they were, almost 300 people, packed all over the complex, with every Internex screen or computer monitor available tuned into CNN to receive the much anticipated message. This would determine for real what the state of the country was; in recovery or heading for open warfare in the streets. Not that it would change much from what had happened the last two days.

(US National Anthem)

At exactly 17:00pm, the last commercial ended and was replaced by a weird film of a white wooden cross with an even odder sort of flag under its right arm.

*** REPLAY - Chapter 6; Cross-burner in chief ***

Donald Trump's speech made a shiver of disgusted fear run down the spines of every woman and man inside the NCIS - OSP complex as it unfolded. The racist, bigoted, inhuman diatribe of hate and contempt for ANYTHING than wasn't a geriatric white christian male of English, German or American descent was so thoroughly impregnated into every aspect of law, politics, governance and national defense put forward by the old man that nobody could by-pass his mental defectiveness anymore.

When he gave himself the accolades as "Papal Lord Amerikus" and new "Christian King of a world full of heathens to purify by crusade", they all knew he'd lost the plot. Then the twelve lick-spittle's had come to kneel at his foot, kissing his sigil ring like the apostles did with Jesus. In truth, it just seemed like a cheap parody of a mafia film from the 1970's. Or maybe a really bad fan-made reenactment of an episode of the History Channel's medieval series Knightfall.
After the presidential message ended, they saw several minutes of drone footage showing the severed heads of political, legal, religious and personal opponents to Trump's desires and grandiose delirium topping the fence points around the White House perimeter. Then the channel switched to commercials until it was 18:00pm and time for the normal CNN news programs which were, bloody obviously enough, ALL about the insanities and changes in the US Federal Government. With so many dead politicians and judges, along with millions of white supremacists backing him, it was now the Truth of the Day that D. would change America forever. What those changes were and how deep they would go... Time only would tell that, now.

Hetty took off her glasses and covered her eyes in a vain attempt to un-see the images, or at least dull them from her senses. She wasn't the only one to do so, as Eric and others did the same, each at their assigned stations. Minutes later, all over the compound, bottles of alcohol were opened and passed around liberally until the order came through; one drink of 1 ounce maximum per person, then stash the bottles and keep them safe for a bad day. They would have more of those coming soon, better not drink everything in one single night, especially with no possibilities for resupply in sight.

After that, Hetty and Mosley convoked the senior agents in the large conference room next to OPS so they could plan the joint NCIS – DXS mission that left tomorrow for Vancouver, out of the John Wayne Airport in Orange County. They had a flight plan for 11:00am, but with what just happened now, and what could still happen tomorrow morning since it was a Sunday... There was now an expectation that Trump would use that morning of prayers to send out another message of hate that would necessitate changes to the plans on the fly.

"Oh, bugger it all!" Hetty swore nastily under her breath as she laced her tea with hard bourbon. Couldn't the idiots in DC leave her to run her patch of sand in peace, anymore?

{ SQ } - { Team building exercise } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 18:21pm)

(Western America; 15:21pm)

Callen and Hanna exchanged a charged look as they surveyed the people assembled in the room for the pre-flight briefing to prepare the long protection mission coming up. They rarely used this conference room unless they had visiting big-wigs from DC or other agencies, as normally the huge monitors in the Operations Rooms made for a better visual aid when explaining city-wide threats. Showing regional maps on a tabletop screen just didn't have the effect or ease of use that the massive plasma screen in OPS had. The other reason was that normally, their meetings rarely involved more people than the OPS staff and the 4 members of the field team, so they could all fit in OPS without crowding the place.

The black skinned ex-SEAL observed the participants gathered and he could tell this would end up getting weird fast. Deeks and Kensi weren't acting themselves since they came back from their recovery run. Eric and Nell were pale faced and tight lipped, like they had lived through a nightmare and still not waken from it yet, just as they were swiping and tapping away at their tablets like there was no tomorrow in view. Anna Kolcheck was pale and silent as usual, but she seemed to stand much closer to Callen than normal, as if seeking support or reassurance from his presence. Hidoko was standing near Mosley who was seated at the very head of the table with a pile of paperwork and two laptops opened in front of her, discussing Pacific Region trends of violence and unrest that had them both making faces like they were preparing a dumpster dive for organic evidence. Then there was Hetty, sitting near him, at the foot of the table with her English fine bone china cup of tea that smelled far stronger than any tea she had ever drank in this room before. And wasn't that a kick in the teeth! Sharing another look with G, Sam sat on Hetty's right with Callen and Anna after him.
Eric, Nell and Hidoko were on Hetty's left. Strangely enough though, Deeks and Blye were still standing near the door to the conference room despite the fact the table could seat 16 people easily.

Shay Mosley looked up to take stock of her meeting crew and the atmosphere, hiding a wince at what she saw; the fracture lines that had appeared in the last year were now glaring at her face. They were losing Deeks and Blye at high speed, she could just feel it. Callen and Hanna stayed because of Hetty, same as Kolcheck. Beale and Jones were on the fence, but they would move as a unit as their relationship was now complete and they were no longer being discrete about it. She had Hidoko's trust and support, but that didn't make a full department and she couldn't place half of the Pacific seaboard on the woman's shoulders anymore than she could carry it all alone herself. This team was sick, and she was clueless as to how to heal it.

The doors slid open to admit the team's operational psychologist, sporadically when he was in town, Nate Getz who had a thick paper file covered in red 'Top Secret' and 'Classified' sticky patches all over it, that he was reading as he walked. Giving the room a quick once-over, he walked all the way to sit on Mosley's left hand, placing his folders on the table, and an active tablet next to that.

"I have revised the person's file as requested, Director Mosley, and I'm ready to make the recommendations you asked." Nate spoke softly as he usually did. Even the chaos in the streets wouldn't change that part of his character; soft words, slow gestures, gentle smiles, all designed to be non-aggressive to put the auditors at ease and more receptive to his interventions.

The black skinned woman at the head of the table nodded once then gazed probingly at Henrietta Lange across the length of the wooden table. The OSP manager made a vague gesture with the hand that held the cup of suspicious tea, making it clear she thought the senior-ranked woman should have the pole on this. Well, far from Mosley the idea she needed permission from her underling to do her job, but this particular underling had even Leon Vance dancing to her tune, when she really took out the violin for a jig.

"Agent Blye, detective Deeks, if you could join us?" Shay asked sarcastically when she realized uncomfortably that the pair was likely to spend the meeting standing by the doors if she didn't reel them in. Yep, they were losing them... "Thank you all for being present here promptly as you were asked when we drew the activity schedules yesterday evening."

Nate smiled disarmingly at the woman who outranked them all before tapping his tablet to activate a set of images on the computers around the room. "This is Lucas Andrew Wise Holtzenstein Wolenczak, doctor of pharmacology, neurology and psychiatry as well as 'professor-level' expert of utilities, infrastructures, cybernetics and creator of the only functional neural interface to date. He is presently 15 years old, with his birthday on 24th December making him 16, if he lives that long..."

"Whoa! Are you telling me that kid is 3 times a bloody doctor? At his age? And all in medicine? How did that happen?" Sam asked, completely taken by surprise, and a bit scared too. Medics made for damnable enemies when they went off the deep end.
Nate shrugged, indicating the file on the computer. "You have a timeline of his life and activities since he was born included in the briefing notes. The kid was educated almost exclusively from his residence or from his office when he moved to Stanford, so he wasn't held back by the slowest student in class and could pack his days any ways he liked. He's reputed as a chronic workaholic and insomniac who routinely works 20 to 26 hours then sleeps 9 to 14 hours to do it all over again. With a routine like that, and a complete absence of any social life that we could determine, he packed about three times more work hours per week in his lifetime than anybody else. And he has been doing that since he was 4 years old, when his grand-parents died and he was left pretty much to his own self. Except, of course, for the abusive, violent tutors forced unto him by mother between ages 4 and 10, when he left for Stanford."

Marty gripped the table edge with white knuckled hands as he asked tersely "What about that? What was said on the TV news yesterday evening? Was it as bad? Cuz I remember some cases back when I was LAPD full time, and kids who suffer that much for so many years... It never ends well... And with his credentials and all he studied and did... What are we looking at, Nate? What's the damage gonna be when this kid blows his top at our guys?"

"Well, he has superb qualifications in everything necessary for becoming a doctorate of pharmacology; chemistry, biochemistry, biogenics, genetics, molecular engineering and extended material sciences. He has created and patented several new medical molecules to be used as drugs or parts of the alloys that compose medical implants. Plus the fact that as a research pharmacologist, he has to be intimately acquainted with immunology, toxicology, epidemiology, community medicine and everything associated to evaluate what medications should be created and how to dispense them..."

Deeks sneered at the table at large as he snarked out "Sooo, Apocalypse bad! Just like every other time we faced a bastard with bio-weapons, except this little kiddie wouldn't be limited to what's in his canister, he could make more or change sorts on the way, just cuz he feels like it! Why didn't you lead with that, Nate? Why didn't you tell us just how fucking screwed the country is, from the start? Because after what Trump and his coterie of ring-kissers just did a half hour ago, I can tell you this kid won't take it sitting down; he'll be on the warpath, and already shooting as we speak. So, Nate, how do you think your dear colleague will react when he sees that presidential address?"

Marty growled, full of undirected anger, just begging for a target to lash out at.

Nate sighed, passing a hand through his short brown hair as he did. "Not well. He won't take it well at all. And the reaction will be bad, like guns blazing, bombs blowing up, entire towns on fire bad... This young man has, besides his magnificent medical education, several equally superb qualifications in civil engineering, electronics, cybernetics, programming and higher mathematics. In fact, he is so good in math that he is rumored to have developed a proprietary mathematical system that he has based his computer programs and circuits on, thus making them almost un-hackable because people just don't understand the underlying concepts and architecture they are built on. Consequently, this boy can hack his way through almost any system the USA, the North American Confederation or the UEO have in place without too much trouble. That is one of the reasons The World Bank has had him as a 'Preferred Supplier' for cybernetic security & services for the last four years, and they accepted to lease him office space in their San Francisco complex. They made a friend of him, and have stayed friendly since. The completely insane clusterfuck coming out of Washington DC could change that on a pinhead, before we can even realize there has been a change."

Hetty was holding her cup of adulterated tea with both hands, gazing deeply into its ethylic depths like a seer contemplating The Great Beyond as she asked firmly "Who do you recommend we send for the team, mister Getz? This needs careful consideration, if this young man is as important, yet as volatile and dangerous, as you explained to us."
Mosley interrupted tersely "He's no more dangerous or volatile than the people around this table. I would remind you that the 'Papal Lord' wants to exterminate half the people in this room; Hetty is clearly biologically defective, Callen has gypsy blood, Hanna, Hidoko and myself are slave-stock that has rebelled and there is a chance that Kensi could be euthanized because that little birth mark in her eye could also label her as defective. That would leave Deeks, Beale, Jones and Getz alive, if they proved loyal. Kolcheck would be declared as a russian spy and probably interrogated before trying to sell her back to Russia, or a public execution, depending on which way the Big Man's cock was shaking at that moment. Since doctor Wolenczak qualifies as jewish, a rebellious child who then fled his parents and the country thus committing heresy, sedition and treason, I really don't think he's acting out of madness or insanity. More like, justifiable self-defense against a group of mad cultists called 'NAZI' that we all thought we put down 7 decades back. Obviously, the job was never finished properly, as they are haunting us still."

Deeks' mouth was moving silently in a good imitation of a goldfish when Kensi tapped his forearm to 'reboot' him. Thanking his fiancé with a smile, he took a deep calming breath and nodded his acceptance of her judgment at Mosley, getting a surprised expression on her face for a fraction of a second. Nate took the chance he had to spell out his recommendations.

"NCIS needs to take the legal and medical pole position in this; the DXS team will be heavy hitters for protection tasks but light on anything else, especially any capacity to process federal documents and law enforcement perspective questions. They operate in the shadows, but we need this to live in the light so it can tolerate media scrutiny better than what Trump and acolytes are doing. That means that my recommendations are; from us, detective Deeks and director Mosley; from NCIS - NOLA, agent Grigorio; and from FBI - DC, doctor Temperance Brennan to commit a medical evaluation of the teenager's health status."

The blank looks around the table were not encouraging. Nate sighed tiredly then proceeded to explain why he proposed the people he did. "Deeks was a lawyer, then a cop, and now NCIS liaison so he has the clear and needed legal expertise. So does agent Grigorio who used to be a lawyer before she joined the FBI, and then NCIS about a year ago. Director Mosley gives the entire thing both the legal kudos needed to convince the teenager that it's all above board and legit, and it has the benefit of moving the EAD – PAC out of the reach of Trumpists and white-power militias. Besides, you control all of the Pacific Ocean region for NCIS, where your laptop and files are located is pretty much irrelevant to the actual job so, might as well make you safe by taking you off the game board. And doctor Brennan is one of the few forensic anthropologists alive, is a genius in several medical fields, and has compiled hundreds of successful criminal cases in the decade she has worked with the Bureau. Since she is a skeletal specialist, she could also give us an accurate layout of the young man's health prognosis, and serve as treating physician during the protection detail and the eventual trip back here."

"That sounds nice, doctor Getz" Mosley replied with a smile that didn't reach her eyes, "but there are two impossibilities in your list. Doctor Brennan is on the list of priority medical personnel to evacuate from the DC metro area in case of insurrection, and therefore is no longer available as her and her family were already relocated by the FBI yesterday evening when the 'Noah's Ark' was declared. Then there is me; I will not leave US territorial borders, no matter what. Further more, as a black woman descended from slaves who were beaten, raped, and broken, on a cotton plantation in Carolina, you can be certain that I will fight for this country, not leave it for the safety of the neighbor's backyard."

Hetty set her cup in its saucer, on the table, and pushed it away from herself. Making a face as if she had sucked a lemon, the elderly spymaster asked tartly; "And who do you propose then, director?"

Mosley looked around the room before answering "Deeks and Blye from us since they make an
incredibly functional team. From NOLA, Grigorio and their forensic tech, who successfully passed FLETC training and became a field agent, Sebastian Lundt. He has the qualifications to handle all the samples and medical filing to back up the case and forms compiled by Deeks and Grigorio in the name of US courts. Blye can fill in the slot let loose by the DXS having a tech on their usual field team so that brings us to 4 fighters and 4 less-fighter but still capable to defend themselves. Manager Dwayne Pride's reports on both Grigorio and Lundt are quite telling.

Hetty pursed her lips in thought, then asked the crucial question: "I don't see a problem with that layout, but will the NOLA agents be able to reach us in time to board the DXS jet at JWA?"

Shay sat back into her chair, letting the backrest take her weight for a moment before she answered "If we send the order right away inside the coming hours, they can be in a chartered jet or US Navy plane in about 2 hours then reach us in LA in time to drive across town and berth directly at the airport in Orange County, to take off with the combined team at the appointed time. It will be a bit tight, but manageable on both ends. Besides; Pride will want a part of this, if only to have a part in kicking the idjit rednecks in DC in the teeth."

OSP manager Lange smiled an unkind smile as she agreed to that sentiment. Looking around at her operatives, she asked for objections or comments. Seeing none, even from the two who would leave, the meeting was adjourned so the pair could make their final preparations for a lengthy stay on foreign soil while on active duty.

Hometown hurt

(MacGyver 1985 – opening theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 16:55pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 13:55pm

MacGyver's house

Los Angeles, California, USA

The three 'young adults' sat around the table in the dining room, eating slowly their meals while Jack was conscientiously wiping clean his plate of any remaining sauce with a piece of bread since he had been a mite peckish this morning. Their very early breakfast had been short and far too easy for his Texan tastes, and short on meat too. A bloody European style frozen egg & cheese croissant with coffee and hop! Off to work for the day! You don't feed grown men like that and expect them to work all day. Then again, the sorts of provisions they kept on the DXS MD-11C plane were rather basic, and chosen for the surety of storing them for prolonged periods, not taste or fanciness.

Thankfully, after finishing up at Phoenix HQ and driving across the remake of Mad Max that the town was becoming, lunch had been far better than expected. Bozer had wanted to show off his traditional 'Christmas Brisket' given how they were likely to be up in Canada for several weeks, if not months, on this protection gig. Better eat most of the big perishables now than waste them, and they couldn't be taken across the border, so they were emptying the refrigerator by either making preserves or eating it.

Jack looked over at the other 'real adult' in the house, wondering what she thought of all this. Snorting in humor, the Delta-Forces specialist had – again – to remind himself that none of them were kids, even though Riley had almost become his daughter and Angus and Bozer were the same age as her. Calling the three 27 year olds 'kids' would see him pranked to Hells and back with three different vengeances and no peace in sight. Better keep his paternal instincts on the hand brakes for
Now, still, the other person from the same generation as him that resided in the house presently was worrying him, and for good cause.

Riley's mother, Diane Hessop. She dropped 'Davis' when her ex-husband Elwood, Riley's father, had disappeared into oblivion without warning the last time. That was almost six years before Riley was sent to jail for 3 years for hacking the NSA, a task she had willingly botched to get caught, thus thwarting the terrorists who were forcing her by threatening to kill off her mother. Diane had been able to leave her undercover life & job in Vancouver after the hacktivist group 'The Collective' which threatened Riley had finally been disbanded by Phoenix a year ago.

Now that Diane was back in Los Angeles, to be close to her daughter, the town was on fire. Literally. Like fire in the streets burning. First it was massive forest fires that turned west on the winds to sweep into the outer suburbs and all the way to the ocean shores. After that it was repetitive mud slides since there was now flooding at every rainstorm that came. And now, it was fire again as all the nutcases were coming out to play in open daylight. White-power militias, sects and cults of all sorts, and the collapse of law enforcement inside of 24 hours, all together meant even the run-of-the-mill criminals were turning dangerous and mindless, too.

First they had traveled by jet in the dead hours of night and dawn, followed by a Hell of a rough ride through town from John Wayne Airport across most of LA to reach the Foundation building, with burned or burning houses and cars along the way, and scared, panicked civilians all over. Shoppers were trying to hug the walls as they jogged between stores and houses, just like you see in old films about World War I & II where people are afraid of air raids and snipers. Then they waited for hours for the vid-meet with Matty, after which he had chosen to wait for Riley while she taught the other tech-heads how to detect the type of hack the Wolenczak kid had tagged them with. At mid-morning when they left Phoenix HQ, Jack had a gut feeling and insisted on a long detour specifically to pass through the neighborhood where Diane had decided to set up this time around. It was a rather lower middle-class area with several small independent stores and a lot of newer families from recent immigrants. The shape of the place was BAD, and Jack's gut was churning something fierce, until they reached the small four storey building where Diane lived.

There was a bunch of thugs wearing hoodies and balaclavas grouped around the base of the edifice, bashing in the main door with crowbars and fire-axes, destroying the bank of mail boxes inside the vestibule and starting their way up the stairs to loot or wreck the apartments. Then one turned around and Jack saw the two red & black Nazi flags printed on each side of the torso on the guy's leather jacket. The Delta-Forces specialist didn't need anything more to jump out of his SUV with a pistol in each hand, whistling loudly to get the attention of as many perps as he could. When about half the group turned towards him and he saw they all had Nazi insignias, SS badges or Germanic runes on their clothes, Jack didn't hesitate anymore.

The history he had learned in high school and his training for DF showed clearly that you don't negotiate with Nazis or skinheads; they only talk when they're out of ammo and knives, and tied to a table unable to move anymore. He lined up his shots, not even using the laser pointers on the pistols to bring down six thugs in 4 seconds before concentrating on the cluster packed inside the vestibule that were now orienting towards him, trying desperately to come out and bullrush him before he could finish the job. At that point, another gun resounded as Riley had lowered her window on the SUV's shotgun side and let loose with her own pistol, cutting down perps as they tried to run out of the building. Jack finished off the three last skinheads in view then took a run inside the edifice, jumping over corpses and men writhing in pain on the ground, to climb up the stairs three at a time. Behind him, he heard the report of a pistol shooting again and again, telling him that Riley had left the truck to finish off the men who had just endangered her mother. It wasn't like the LAPD would intervene, not in this neighborhood, not when the nice rich locales in Hollywood, Malibu, Beverly Hills or Long Beach were sooo much more important that there weren't any police cruisers
Jack had killed the last perp on the doorstep of an elderly latino grand-mother who was blind since birth and never hurt anybody. The 79 year old lady walked around with a white cane to tap her path around and a stout wooden stick to lean her ample girth on so she could still be mobile. Why in bloody blue blazes had that skinhead wanted in there was beyond Dalton's comprehension, and well beyond the Nazi as well, on account of taking a double-tap to the heart from behind without any warning.

After reassuring the old woman that she would be safe until her sons came to get her, and dumping the dead body down the well in the middle of the stairs, he finally reached Diane's flat and banged on the door to see if she was home. She was, as she worked from home for the job she had taken until she could find something better adapted to her wants. Recognizing Jack's voice immediately, she had let him in, heard his explanation and accepted his help to pack her valuables and necessities back in her set of luggage so she could move her life yet again.

After a teary reunion with Riley, who had come up to back-up Jack if he needed it, the three worked to pack the small flat right back into the same suitcases Diane had used to come from Vancouver, which had been the same she had used when leaving LA, years ago. Then they had rolled quickly to Riley's apartment building, in a slightly better sector but also seeing civil unrest and signs of violence in the streets. Jack had not taken 'no' for an answer; him and Diane made quick work of invading the young woman's dwelling to 'force' her to pack, leaving only the useless or unwanted stuff behind.

The drive through town to Jack's own flat had been miserable and fraught with fear as they now had two vehicles, since Riley had argued they would need to put her stuff in her own car to leave place for Jack's possessions in his SUV. With Diane's luggage already taking up a lot of space, they could not afford to have just one transport to reach his apartment or he would leave with a pair of duffel bags, no more. The excursion over at his building was short and straight, as he had several emergency go-bags packed at all times and stashing the rest of the few valuables could be done while the two women lugged his prepared sacks down to the cars. It took less than 10 minutes to pick apart and shutter his place, compared to almost 30 for each of the women. Then they faced another high speed drive through a city at war with itself.

And now, here they were, at MacGyver & Bozer's house.

They had arrived at 13:30pm and Jack had demolished the plate of food put in front of him like he hadn't eaten solid matter in a month. Riley and Diane had picked at their meals, eating a bit less than half. The real kicker though, had been Bozer and Mac. The two young men weren't growing teenagers anymore but they still needed to eat, especially since everything indicated that there would be a bloody lot of trouble all night long. At 5 minutes to 14:00pm, Angus stood to clear their plates in the sink's trash grinder while Wilt grabbed the remote to activate the Internex monitor mounted on the living room wall, dialing it to CNN by force of habit. A habit Mac had for years, but Bozer had understood it only since he started working at Phoenix, in the field missions team.

Jack almost drew his weapon on Angus to ask security identification questions when he saw the holster with the Sig Sauer P320 pistol on his right hip, extra magazines and kit sheaths hung on his belt, as if he were ready for a war. Then Jack realized that he was. Angus Timothy MacGyver had somehow broken through the mental blockage that made him almost allergic to firearms enough to pull out his old EOD service sidearm. Somehow, Dalton couldn't help but feel the world had just lost something precious, when that green-eyed boy had decided to pick up hard steel in his hands in anger again.

"Hey, people! The dumb-ass who started all this is about to talk! Get in front of the TV!" Bozer
shouted from his new location on the living room couch, on the left side, with Riley in the middle and Diane on the right side. The other two men walked over to see the tail-end of the channel's blurb about the coming presidential address. Angus and Jack sat in individual sofas to watch the coming program with apprehension, as the video briefing with Matty Webber this morning hadn't been anything reassuring, and there weren't any news from Lake Barcroft since.

*** REPLAY - Chapter 6; Cross-burner in chief ***

(Eastern America; 18:05pm)

(Western America; 15:05pm)

"This isn't good. Please Mac, tell me I'm not imagining just how not good this is!" Bozer asked in a weak voice, looking at the man who was essentially his brother from different parents.

"It isn't simply not good, Bose, it's bad beyond anything America has ever lived, even back in the MacCarthy era. This is Nazism back in action at full force. The old bastard just didn't name it aloud, but that's what it is."

Dalton snorted at that, interjecting "No, it's worse. The Nazis at least didn't treat their women and children worse than diseased cattle the way this guy wants to do. And they certainly didn't authorize people to go around the streets beating, raping, maiming, and killing, anybody they wanted under the vague pretexts of 'keeping slaves and kids docile' and that sort of tripe. This is completely made-up shit coming out of his backside like a gushing river, and I have no idea where he took his ideas from. This certainly ain't no God from no Bible that I learned about in grade school back in Texas, I can tell you that!" the middle-aged soldier exclaimed angrily at the deplorable spectacle of inhumanity they had just witnessed.

In a clear show of just how affected he was, Angus stood up to march over to the small bar that was built on the side of the living room to hold the few liquor and beer bottles they kept in the house. Finding the bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon whiskey, he took it up and grabbed enough tumblers for everybody in the room. He handed the glasses out with shaking hands, then filled them slowly to avoid spilling any liquid on the floor. Given how everybody was out of their minds right now, it was wise to not waste anything they had, as they had no idea when commerce and supplies would be regularized again to restock once they were out of stuff.

The young man was completely unaware of what feelings the holstered pistol at his right hip evoked in his three friends when they saw it so clearly, the matte black plastic sheath contrasting menacingly against the light brown of his pants and pale beige of his long sleeved T-shirt. The persons in question would have been relieved to know that wearing the pistol again after four years wasn't doing any wonders for his digestion or equilibrium either. If anything Mac was having second, third, and fourth thoughts about the sanity of him carrying a loaded gun for any reason other than serving as caddie for teammates during a mission.

After a bracing mouthful of hard bitter liquor, all five people looked at each other in the eyes and talked about what happens next. Nobody wanted to leave Diane alone in the house for weeks or months, but they couldn't bring her to the Foundation building either; that place was a bigger and worse target for Trump supporters and God-nuts than the anonymous house in the LA suburbs would ever be. While Bozer's family would happily receive her for a few weeks, they were all blacks (well duh!) and therefore no longer had any rights or capacities under the new Pure Christian America Laws that had just been proclaimed. Even if Diane could travel down to where the Bozer family lived, she would not be safe, simply because the militias would come to harm them, sooner and harder than they wanted to think about it. And the fact they were powerless to physically help the Bozer clan was eating away at their gut something fierce.
Riley asked aloud "Why doesn't she just come with us to Canada? There's place in the jet and the NCIS people won't be bringing anybody else, they would have to tell us in advance so we can vet them during the background checks."

Jack answered without any real hope "We can call Matty to ask, but I wouldn't get my hopes up. This is way against procedures, Ri, and even I have a hard time justifying asking for it, no matter how much I care for both of you."

Angus commented "Why don't we ask the NCIS people? They have a large compound in LA too, and they seemed to have better, more extensive organizational preparations for the 'Noah's Ark' protocols than we do. Maybe they can take her in, or offer a bunk in some agent's family during the period of unrest."

Riley smiled tiredly at her blond friend, answering him "Yeah, I'll call them straight away. We need to decide tonight what happens so we can make it real. Why don't you three guys finish prepping the house a bit before taking a couple hours' nap before dinner and the night watch. I don't think this neighborhood will see trouble before dark. Here, the cops might actually spare a car or two if an alarm goes off. Wealthy upper middle-class white folks and all that shite..." The young woman griped as she marched from the couch to the small side table where her laptop and field gear had been dumped upon entering the house. She was going to set up for the long watch anyways, so she might as well do it now and contact the NCIS mission team to get their roster, personnel files and schedule early while she was asking her pressing question.

{ SQ } - { Helping each other } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 18:51pm)

(Western America; 15:51pm)

After a half hour of unpacking, plugging, booting and configuring hardware to run with anonymity & counter-hack apps constantly wiping the traces behind everything she did, Riley finally managed to contact the NCIS – OSP in Los Angeles to get a sit-rep. The young hacker was lucky that they were just finished setting up their own team roster and travel plans, with confirmation from their New Orleans division that the agents requested would be at John Wayne Airport for their common ride ahead of time. The mission team's lead agent was Senior Special Agent Kensington (Kensi) Blye, and she had just come out of the planning session, therefore they could speak with her. A few minutes of wait saw Riley and Kensi talking about their problems and necessities.

Jack Dalton, passing behind Riley with a rather large armload of supplies that he was bringing to the cars outside for their trip, heard the two women trying to come to an arrangement as amicably as they could since Ms Blye understood Riley's predicament real well. Dumping the stuff on the couch for a tick, Jack walked to the women huddled around the computer screen and introduced himself kindly to the people onscreen. "Hey there, Navy cops! I'm Jack Dalton, ex-Delta-Forces, now at DXS, and gun-toter for this here group. I hear you could have a place for my good friend Diane here, but you're afraid you could be short on food and goods rather than space to share, is that correct, Ma'am?"

Kensi valiantly ignored Eric and Nell snickering at her side while she tried not to blush, or be insulted, at being called 'Ma'am' since the guy meant it as a politeness. She was 32 years old, not 75! She was no 'Ma'am' material yet! But she'd worked with Texans before, and those who were genuine in their culture were pretty damned fierce about being truly respectful to people around them at all times. Southern Hospitality and manners were taught young over there, and nobody laughed at uncouth or crass behavior when it came to helping neighbors in bad community situations like here now.
Putting on her best smile despite the loaded gun aimed at them all, and the burning city around the building, Kensi spoke to him. "Yes, that's the situation, agent Dalton. My fiancé and I are lucky enough that we already share a large house with a large fully integrated garage and large backyard, all fenced in and tightly secured. We even have a concrete bunker in the basement and steel sheltering closets at each level in case the worse happens without warning. Now, we have put both of our mothers in that house, so they would be safer than their individual apartments during our prolonged absence. Just like you want to do with Diane. The problem now becomes this; how do they get resupplied? With two women over 50 years old in the same house, the food will last only so long, with 3, it would be shorter. I don't deny that they would be safer inside the walls being 3 to watch the cameras and fences, but the restocking situation becomes more pressing, and more recurring. Not to mention, how do they find the food and pay or trade for it? Because we all know this is going to end up a situation without electronics, bank accounts, checks or money. People will want solids on the table like guns, munitions, alcohol, drugs, medicines, raw metal to work, etc..."

Jack frowned in thought as he listened to the NCIS agent explain her dilemma and found he couldn't fault her, nor scoff at her fears. Diane was no fighter and had never served in an armed job in her entire life. If she had fled the USA on an official 'witness protection' deal between governments, maybe she could have asked to be taught to shoot a pistol or shotgun, but she had run under dark, pushed by Riley after the NSA Hack incident. By what he heard though, the other two older ladies weren't any more militarized than Diane.

"The only thing I can say, Ma'am," Jack put out, "Is that the situation you describe will be the new normal for Los Angeles in about two to three weeks, and the entire USA in about six to eight weeks at the latest. DXS has already heard intel chatter about several banking groups declaring the new Papal Lord Amerikus and his shindig-buddies as 'illegal entities'. Those banks plan to block the new government system from using the USA's treasury, and they already said they won't execute court warrants to block or seize the assets of the supposed 'under-beings' that Trump wants to kill or enslave. No matter which way you look at this, either you leave the USA the same way people have been leaving the Middle-East for almost a century now, because of the ceaseless civil and religious wars, or you stay and try to make a life. There ain't no two ways about it, but those."

Kensi Blye looked at the small family assembled before the monitor, worrying her lips as she gazed at them thoughtfully. Finally, she told them "Let me talk to Marty about this, cuz his mom's involved in it too. Since you need a few minutes to geek out with Eric and Nell to exchange all the mission comms protocols and coordinates and stuff... You do that and I'll go talk with my man. We'll have an answer by the time I get back in about ten minutes or so. Thank you guys, for calling and talking to us, we needed it."

Riley swallowed passed the lump of uncertainty in her throat as she began the protocol exchanges with the NCIS operations analysts on screen while Diane and Jack tried to be unobtrusive besides her. About ten minutes later as they were finishing the tech talk, agent Blye came back with a young man dressed in the same tactical clothing as the rest of the people on screen but with a messy mop of shaggy blond hair and deep blue eyes. Her fiancé had black circles under his eyes and a haunted look to his face, as if he hadn't been sleeping enough or had seen horror recently. Jack could sympathize with him. Riley could see the appeal right away, and so could her mother. The guy had 'hug me' written all over him.

Kensi smiled as best she could, then presented her fiancé. "Hey guys, this here is my fiancé Martin Deeks, detective from the LA police department. He is the official liaison officer between our two forces to help coordinate investigations into organized crime's infiltration and smuggling through navy channels."

"Ma'am Hessop, Miss Davis, tall guy with the guns on him," Deeks started with a tired but friendly,
playful smirk as his fiancé raised her eyes to Heaven in frustration while elbowing him in the side. The amused snort coming in stereo from Jack and Riley while Diane smiled wistfully at their playful love, set the mood at ease for the conversation. "Look, you guys, I understand your situation, cuz we're in the same with our moms too. Neither ever held a gun in their lives until we decided to start living together for real. Then we realized the sorts of trouble we got in regularly, so we pushed them both to learn some basic beginner's self defense and how to shoot at least a small pistol and a shotgun for household protection. Even then, they still need to sleep at some point, and they could get sick, injured, you know the hazards of ordinary life... So yeah... We called them during your little geek-out and asked them. They would be ecstatic to welcome Diane for a coupe of weeks, or more, depending on what happens to the country."

Kensi jumped in; "But we would have a small favor to ask your team if it's at all possible? We at NCIS have organized through our OPS room an emergency overwatch of all the residences, vehicles, civilian jobs and communications of our families and dependents so they could get help if we aren't home or ever get injured or killed. Do you have something similar for DXS, and will you link our house and mothers to your side of things too if you do? We would like to make the security and support network as tight as we can, considering neither of them is a combatant by any stretch f the imagination..."

Jack smiled widely at the four people on the screen, their request being the very basics of civility and neighborliness in his books. "Of course we have something like that! We had to prepare for the 'Noah's Ark' too! Riley, why don't you transfer them the coordinates and security layouts with the access codes to all our homes and cars to begin with, then take theirs, then you can make a vid-meet with the tech-heads back at Phoenix to set up the mutual support system. That'll give us a way to check out each other's digs while we're away in Canada. In fact, why don't you contact your people from New Orleans that are supposed to come over and offer them the same setup? I know DXS doesn't have that many facilities, and none in NOLA, but if we at least hear the call for help, we can plan contingencies or send help over to them late rather than never."

With a flow of easy conversation and willingness to help and support each other against the coming tides of darkness and desolation, the basis for a New America were being laid on secret back-channels, between people who had never met or heard of each other, but now realized just how vital they were to each other's families and livelihood. It is a truism that adversity burns away idiocy and uselessness, forcing what is left to adapt, evolve and make itself better. For the DXS and NCIS agents, who were already amongst the best that America and humanity had to offer, they would now get to see how much better and adaptable they could get, in order to survive and drag their families through the conflagration.

Not a world fit for children anymore

(Funeral March – Frederic Chopin)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 17:00pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 14:00pm

Daleminton Hotel; suite #204

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Lucas closed and locked the office doors before walking back to the dining room table. He had just finished guiding the hotel servers to place the two materials crates and the two last modules of the Cyberghast Hub properly in the workroom but hadn't bothered to connect them yet. He was still eating his only true solid meal of the day, and had only managed the soup and appetizer salad to date.
He had barely managed to prepare a mixed plate of chicken, London steak and grilled sole with scalloped potatoes, rice and hot grilled vegetables, that the entry door had buzzed with his delivery. When the UPS Overland Services truck had delivered his equipment two days ago, only the two most important modules had been brought up, the remaining 4 pieces had been put in storage in the leasable lockers in the basement of the Daleminton. It was now time to assemble the entire system, but later. Food first.

Lucas sat back in front of his warm food and turned the TV sound back up to a level audible even without paying serious attention to the program. There was a presidential address coming up, and he wanted to see just what the dumb, criminal retard would say to hang himself with. At 17:00pm on Washington DC's clock, all television and radio channels were co-opted by the US Department of Communications to broadcast the message in such a way that nobody could miss it anywhere on Earth.

*** REPLAY - Chapter 6; Cross-burner in chief ***

(Eastern America; 18:10pm)

(Western America; 15:10pm)

The television was now dark, turned off after the Papal Lord Amerikus had finished disbursing his poison upon reality. The teenager sat in his chair, his plate of succulent, fresh cooked food completely untouched before him on the table, just as he placed himself a little over an hour ago. Looking far away into empty space, arms wrapped around himself in a self-protective hug, the boy began to sway on his chair, a low soul-warping keen emitting from deep inside his belly to come out his lips without any conscious decision on his part.

After a good 15 minutes of psychological trauma and mental collapse during which the shocked, terrorized, adolescent could not perceive reality nor connect with anything outside his mind, the wailing stopped completely. Setting his elbows on the table and his face in his hands, Lucas let out the tears of despair, depression and despondency that were the only sane way he could express himself anymore. Unseen and forsaken, Lucas sobbed his heart out, thinking of his grand-parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws, imagining what they would say if they saw that this world still had not learned the lessons of Nazism, Hitlerianism, sectarianism and religious drift into pure fabulation.

History had tried to teach them, fools that they all were, but they spat upon both education and teacher alike. They, worshipers, militias and street gangs alike, would be made to learn and remember the One Truth of Human Misery, regardless of what they felt or thought. The alternative method of teaching to be employed was unconventional/experimental wide-area armaments against population centers and tactical geographic landmarks that would come in due time, when Lucas was good and ready for it.

Standing up on wobbly legs, the youth needed to lean on his cane, furniture or walls, to make his way to the serving cart where he placed his prepared, but untouched, plate in the warming compartment, in the side of the vehicle. In a half-hour or so it would get back to edible warmth without nuking it; a much preferable method as microwave ovens tended to scrap the taste of what they reheated.

Walking to the bathroom, Lucas hobbled as fast as he could safely move, to the shower for a long session of emergency hydrotherapy to warm his body and stabilize his aching legs. As he marched, the boy could see his arms still shaking hard and felt more shivers sliding down his spinal column, with being woozy and having troubles with his eyes and ears. All of these together were symptoms of going into a state of shock. That meant he needed urgently to raise his core temperature quickly or
he could fall unconscious; then things would get worse fast from there on, if was alone without any help.

The boy started up the shower then made certain to place his cellphone in close proximity in case he had graver health problems that required him to call for an ambulance. He quickly got undressed, dumping everything in a pile on the floor without a care; he planned to wear it all again when he finished his unforeseen shower, unless it all smelled. Right now, he wasn't even sure he was breathing, let alone what smelt what, so he would wait until he had been brought back from the brink to make decisions. Looking at the time on the wall mounted clock, he gave himself 10 minutes to warm up his core back to normal, then an extra 15 to 20 minutes just to relax under the spray. If he couldn't warm up and stop the shakes inside that first 10 minutes, he needed to call that ambulance and hotel security fast before he blacked out and injured himself even worse.

Fumbling badly with the emergency med-kit normally at the small of his back to yank it off the belt and put it on the washroom counter, the teen was getting desperate as his shivers became worse and affected his entire body. He needed imperatively to find this damned syringe NOW if he wanted to pass through this. Finally setting down the small kit, he got the snaps and zipper opened, searching roughly through the contents until he found what he wanted: a spring-loaded syringe built like an Epipen but holding a very different chemical.

This little device contained something that Lucas had been designing for almost four years now, to be used in the context of clinical psychiatry or prison infirmaries, but also to resolve shell-shock & PTSD symptoms or post-fight combativeness. The compound he had called 'Equilibrium I-a' served to react with and dissolve adrenaline molecules down to harmless basal elements before they reached the brain, affecting cognitive functions towards aggressivity and violent reactions. This could easily counter the symptoms of shock, as he was now beginning to experience, or take a violent perpetrator and forcibly revoke the fuel for his rage-driven rampage.

Lucas grabbed the sky-blue colored spring-pen, tore off the cap, twisted harshly the actuator knob, then jabbed down on the middle of his thin meatless left forearm, in the thickest and most muscular part he could see, not that there was a whole lot more meat there than any other place on him. It took barely 40 seconds for the first effects of the serum to be felt as his eyes burned less and his inner ears stopped the infernal ringing he hadn't even been aware of until it ceased. He left the wasted spring-pen, parts and torn plastic sterility wrapper on the counter, walking to the shower as soon as he could in his state.

"Alexa!" he croaked out in hoarse tones as his scratchy throat pained to work properly. "Set the hotel's emergency services alarm to call medical help in 10 minutes, prompt me to ask if I cancel or prolong."

"Yes Doctor Wolenczak. 10 minutes delay until EMT's are called. Request confirmation before action." the domotics server answered in its unflappable North-American female tone.

Pulling down the steel washing table for children and sick adults, Lucas adjusted the four individual shower heads; three to splash from his clavicles down to his toes with hot water, while the fourth was aimed only above his forehead to deliver chilled water to cool down the impending shock-induced migraine, fever spike and disorientation. With all the preparations as done as could be with full-body shakes and troubled vision, the adolescent dropped his weight to the low perforated steel washing table and lay himself naked, fully on his back, under the luxurious combined sonic/ionic/water jets.

{(Eastern America; 18:50pm)}
After close to a half-hour of self-regulated emergency hydrotherapy deluxe with the only illumination in the room provided by the wall inset fireplace that blazed cheerily, the teenager could finally begin to feel a modicum of health and stability return to his slight, scarred frame. Emotional equilibrium and sanity would probably never return to him, not even with all the chemicals in his arsenal. Not with the decisions he had come to during his episode of shocky distress whence he fugued from reality as his physical body recovered heat, senses and orientation under the cascading healing waters.

Sitting up on the steel wash-plate, with his feet on the warm wet granite floor of the shower stall, the teen leaned backwards against the wall like a backrest. Eyes closed to keep out reality, he grabbed blindly for the wired remote control system, taking it off the wall peg and bringing it to lay on his lap where his fingers palpated around the dials and knobs, adjusting the temperature, elevation and angle of projection of each shower head to cover him fully while sitting, except the head which he now wanted to keep isolated to let his face dry out.

Another fifteen minutes later and he was calm enough, his breathing regulated enough, to open his eyes and face the dreary, violent new world that awaited him outside the enclosed washroom. Shutting down all the showers functions, the boy used his cane's pommel to hook the large fluffy towel on the heated rack to pull it off and toward him so he could dry himself before dressing again. Taking an experimental sniff at his clothing, he decided that while the smell of sweat wasn't that much, he had suffered enough adrenaline surges, stress and violent attacks in one day to consider that at least his underwear could use a change. Since he needed to access his wheeled suitcase in the bedroom anyways, why not change into something new at the same time? No sense in wasting the feel of cleanliness from his impromptu shower by wearing what he had changed into after the morning's altercations.

Clothes which had been completely clean, right out of the suitcase back then...

Already drenched through with sweat from shocked panic...

At least his body hadn't lost autonomous control to the point he vomited or voided his wastes like an infant or senile asylum patient. Calling the hotel personnel to clean up after an accident like that would have been the death of what little ego and pride he had left in him.

Wiping the persisting wetness off his lean sickly pale face again, the boy ignored studiously the fact it was tears of misery and shock rather than remaining shower water. He wasn't capable anymore of absorbing and tolerating emotional blows the way he just suffered almost an hour ago. Getting up on very shaky legs, swaying a lot more than was safe when you live alone, Lucas donned a bathrobe then used his cane and the walls as support to hobble towards the master bedroom. He needed to find clean clothes and his larger traveling kit of medical supplies to grab something to stabilize his mind for the next 9 to 12 hours while he ate and worked on countermeasures to the depravities he had just witnessed.

Somebody would suffer for this.

Trump and his 'kind' wanted a war... He would give them one!

But it wouldn't be free of charge; conflict was never free of cost.

Finally arriving to his bed, the adolescent gratefully sank on the small wooden straight backed chair next to the bed, to rest his legs and back. Using his cane's pommel to hook its handle, he brought close the large suitcase to take what he needed then closed the lid securely. Now holding his much
larger base-camp medical kit, he rifled through for the long-term anti-shock medication he knew was in there, as well as a clinical-grade mood stabilizer to dampen his emotional reactions. He also needed to take an antacid and some Gravol to steady his stomach enough to eat solid food or he would become too weak and possibly develop a migraine on top of everything else. Working while drugged was never his first, second, or even third, choice, but in this case, he needed the clarity of mind to focus on the tasks in order to come out alive. He couldn't intellectualize the minute subtleties of the facts and make long-term plans if he had a blizzard storming between his ears.

Glaring at the meds bottles in the clear box, Lucas needed to make a very demanding effort to read the labels to pick what he wanted. It angered him that simply finding pills in a kit he had packed himself took so much concentration; he was a damned psychiatrist and pharmacologist, for pity's sake! It shouldn't be this much of a chore to find some bloody pills in a pack smaller than a shoebox! It would be faster to find the pills in his belt-kit, but it was safer strategically and logistically to deplete the stocks inside this large camp-stock pack than the smaller one he belted on for personal emergencies.

Angry, stressed and self loathing, Lucas roughly manhandled the plastic container that kept the kit's meds dry and separated in clearly identified bottles to avoid fatal mix-ups. He finally found and took the four different pills with a mouthful of chilled water from the thermal carafe set on the nightstand for just such necessities. Sitting still for several minutes to let the pills settle in his stomach, the adolescent kept his eyes closed and both hands clamped firmly to his cane as he concentrated on repressing the shakes that still occasionally wracked his entire body. It would take almost a half hour sitting alone, illuminated only by the pale waning sunlight through the patio doors, naked except for the green terrycloth bathrobe he had wrapped about his thin frame when he left the shower.

The teen lit the lamp on the nightstand to have some light to work by. Finally physically and mentally stable to function, he looked at the closed wheeled suitcase and had a flash of genius that would help keep him mobile safely for a while. The case was horizontal with 4 stout straight wheels and a long handle to drag it like a medium sized garden wagon. It was also very solid as the company that manufactured them said you could use it as a stepping stool to reach your other stuff in the overhead bins of trains or airplanes and it could take the weight of other cargo stacked atop it up to 1,000 pounds without problems in the axles or main body.

With a lopsided smile, Lucas grabbed a plump pillow from the bed to place it on the flat top of the aluminum case then sat his thin bony frame on the impromptu vehicle, giving an experimental wiggle to see if it was stable. Wearing a smug smirk of satisfaction at his own brainpower, the teen carefully set the wheel brakes on the trunk before using the furniture to hoist himself to a standing position to dress for the rest of the evening. With every layer of clothing on him now completely fresh and unused up to date, he finally felt human again. Sitting back on the improvised 'medical mobility assistance device' he had rigged, he unlocked the wheels, put the bundled wet bath towel and bathrobe on his lap for the trip, then used a combination of his legs, cane and grabbing walls or furniture to slowly drag his conveyance forward through the bedroom door and into the bathroom. Back in the bath, he dumped everything soiled in the hamper and collected his belts, sheaths and tools. He bundled his dark purple jeans to bring back to his room, later in the day. He put his thin summer sneakers on, appreciating having the warmth around his feet once again. He needed the shoes since that was his only pair of footwear left and the jeans would just get aired out a bit so he could wear them tomorrow. The matte black jeans he wore presently were old and worn, but still fit because his growth and weight gain had been stunted so badly over the last two years of health problems.

With his feet now clad safely, and warmly, with all tools in place, Lucas rolled himself back to the dining room where he set the humid pants on the cast iron rack near the gentle warmth of the wood stove so they could dry out and be usable later. Wearing on his features a small discrete, but genuine,
smile that he kept for only himself when things were finally going his way, Lucas banked the embers in the stove, adding a few logs to keep the flames alive into the evening.

Now having a pleasing source of warmth in the room, he wheeled his still shaky self over to the buffet cart to recover his plate to finally eat one solid meal at long last. Instead of coffee, he started by eating another small bowl of the excellent french canadian pea soup to obtain instant warmth, then recovered his already prepared plate from the heating compartment. Thankfully, it had indeed warmed up as planned over the almost 2 hours since, and even stayed both edible and savory, as he had hoped. Setting himself up to the dining table, he tapped the wired touch tablet to order up something from Netflix on the TV while he ate his meal. No more news until at least 23:00pm on Vancouver's clock; everything would just be pundits, ecclesiastes and foreign diplomats trying to manufacture people's opinions for them. If he wanted to see the real effects of what had happened, he needed to wait at least until noon tomorrow before any real activity occurred.

Inhaling deeply the odors of his warm succulent food, the young male decided to leave it in the warmer a few more minutes as he brewed himself some strong fruity spiced tea for a change, to accompany the excellent meal waiting for him. He felt like he would need something soothing for the evening, so he took the old cast iron kettle from the cupboards near the wood pile, rinsed it in the kitchen sink before filling it and adding the yule season blend he had learned to do when he was a child. Two teaspoons of loose leaf black tea, some ground ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg, half pinch of shredded mint leaves and a handful of mixed small berries from a bag in the freezer completed by some honey.

He wheeled his liquid cargo to the wood stove, where he set it to brew to a perfect, odoriferous therapy for the soul and taste buds. The tea set had a cast iron base with an alcohol burner that Lucas wasted no time to place on the table and light, taking up a matching cast iron goblet. The entire set was decorated with canadian forest scenes, including beavers, elk, owls, rivers, plenty of trees and other things; it would make for an amusing setting to his meal. Besides, he was alone; who the Hell would care or be bothered by it?

After lighting the tea warmer with wooden matches, he recovered his plate to finally begin the solid portion of his meal. His soothing tea would be ready once he had eaten through about half his plate, so he wasn't missing out on anything. Eating his food and letting his mind wander aimlessly as he watched the uninteresting movie on the wall mounted screen, the teen eventually felt the shock and stress evacuate from his person enough to become fully rational again. As he decided to help himself to some ice cream to end his meal, he realized his legs no longer ached and his hands were steady again.

Taking those pills had been the good choice after all.

Making an experimental attempt, he grabbed the side of the dining room table to hoist himself to his feet and managed to stand up easily enough. He was no longer unbalanced or swaying like a tree in a hurricane. Taking a few weary steps around the table and wheeled suitcase that had served him so faithfully, the boy came to the conclusion that he had in fact recovered from his episode of anxiety (mental collapse) and could function normally again (as if!).

Deciding to set off his dessert completely to avoid getting so full he would end up sick, the adolescent told himself he might as well go connect the last elements of the Cyberghast Hub and prepare for a protracted virtual-world conflict that would have direct incidences on reality. He had companies to scuttle, banks to drain, classified systems to bust and several thousand characters to assassinate via social media falsehoods and wiping out their personal data from any subscription sites they ever touched.
Yes, the night was young, and it would bear ill tidings, grim news and fell pronouncements upon those white fools that claimed this stupid 'peasant superstition' of a resurrected rebel convict for their Law.

Grandma's going for a ride

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 18:50pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 15:50pm

UEO district; apartment of Adm. Noyce (location classified)

New Cape Quest, Florida, USA

"Olford! Olford! Where in the bloody blue blazes is that boy? Jamieson Robert Olford! Get back in here, you mannerless cad! Leaving an old woman of my age with a bad back and poor eyesight! Oh, the nerve of the child! Wait till I tell Billy about this!"

The silver haired woman's wrinkled skin was fast becoming pink from her rising blood pressure as she ran around in circles, trying to find everything and pack her numerous suitcases for her trip to the much vaunted Los Angeles. She had an old CIA friend to visit (and poison) before the whole blasted cesspit caught fire without her having been involved in the pyre.

The nerve of them! Didn't they know you wait for the Lady to arrive?

What was it with this generation? They had all left their manners in the trashcan when they graduated from diapers to pull-ups pants? It certainly seemed like it to her venerable eyes, no matter how bad the retinas got; that's why she got glasses two decades ago!

She was answered by a young white man, thirtyish, six feet tall with clear brown eyes, short brown hair and dressed in in the classic dark blue three-piece suit that seemed to be the standard uniform of every governmental bodyguard or 'federal' in service. The badge on his left jacket pocket showed the gold rings & trident over a blue & green field that were the chosen sigil of the United Earths and Oceans Organization. He stood at attention behind the dining room table, well away from her reach as he had learned early on to not let the aged poison-spitting viper lay hands on him.

"I am here, Ma'am. I was on the phone to coordinate your motorcade to the UEO's secured VIP airfield where our transport is being prepared. Your family's 1957 Beech Twin 18 (Hamilton Westwind II STD) turbo propeller floatplane is getting pulled out of the hangar for supplying. It will be at the VIP's secured terminal when we get there in an hour. If you can pack everything on time. The porters are on their way up from the lobby as we speak."

The elderly woman frowned most mightily at the agent, scowling even worse when he failed to react at her obvious displeasure. Whelming her plump five foot three inches of toxic self to stand right in the guy's face, she let loose her verbose vitriol. "And how in tarnation do you suppose that I take all of my confections to that yonder plane when they aren't packed properly for traveling around? You do know that cake icing spoils in the heat and sunlight, don't you? Do you want me to be peddling inedibles to the people we meet on the road? Just how ill-raised are you, boy?" she tried to boss him into giving her more time to box and crate all the (poisoned) food she had spent the last 48 hours cooking.

Unimpressed by his 'principal' and being guaranteed by Admiral Noyce himself that nothing untoward would happen to him, the man gave the grand-mother his blandest smile as he shrugged
helplessly to signify he couldn't change things. "It's the schedule we have, Ma'am. We have to depart from the VIP runway on time or we might get stuck on the tarmac for up to seven hours until the next slot opens. We are not rated as emergency rescue nor active-operation military aircraft therefore the tower controllers will set us back several times before we get our turn on the lane. We get there for a 20:00pm liftoff, or we may as well stay here and re-book our flight plan for tomorrow morning."

Throwing her hands up in the air, the matronly woman swore roundly in french, german and italian as she went to her bedroom to bring her large wheeled suitcase and go-bag to the vestibule. The food would just have to be thrown out by the cleaning staff when they came Monday morning. Oh, what a waste! And she had used the last of her marzipan in two of those scrumptious pastries! What a truly deplorable state of affairs! Well, no; that wouldn't do! Janet sat herself at the dining table with paper and pen to write instructions for the maid to pack her goods and send them to 'un-deserving' people in need of 'dis-comfort' food in their misspent lives. Starting with Trump, his kin and kith...

After finishing her impromptu list of orders, she jogged to her room to finish packing her carry-on bag and the large macrame purse that had made nations quiver in fear for decades. Nobody but the most highly placed spies in Europe or the CIA would ever have the security clearance to know why she carried a set of wooden kitchen implements in her purse, nor what inhumanities she had perpetrated with them in forty years of service. She was called 'The Devil's Baker' for a reason and nobody who knew ever doubted the validity of that appellation. The last person to doubt had been some thirty years ago; he died wrapped in strudel pastry dough filled with strawberry and cranberry coulis after baking inside a low-flamed charcoal furnace for close to two hours. She then promptly fed the whole thing to Billy's pigs. US Naval Intel had owned a convenient 'exfiltration, succor & disposal' site in Luxembourg that was rather well placed right next to the French and German borders. It had been incredibly useful throughout the post-Reich denazification and the following Cold War with the communists from Russia. Ah, Luxembourg! She had been so young, vibrant and svelte back then.

Not like these days; she had more in common with her husband's sows than with humanity anymore.

Chuckling at her own self-deprecating humor, Janet quickly finished off her list of 'gifts' to the supposed friends and colleagues of her husband. She folded the paper on the tabletop and wrote the maid's name on it. The young woman was an amicable, assiduous type; she would do this little something for Janet and the old grand-mother would help her out with her own little something in return, when needed. Her last boyfriend had been a rich daddy's boy with an uncle in the US senate who thought that gave him the right to smack the girl when he was drunk. He was presently fertilizing her herb garden by the roots after a trip through a truck-trailed diesel powered mulcher. It was these small exchanges of favors that made their little circle of community and friends stronger together.

The matronly woman left the dining table to enter the bedroom she shared with her husband. Quickly she assembled all her travel necessities, most of which were always prepacked in small voyager's cases that only needed to be stashed in her carry-on bag with the shoulder strap and she would be set for her overnight trip. Taking a few seconds in front of the tall dressing mirror to set her hair a bit better, she took a few long hair pins made out of hand-carved teak wood in Thailand some 35 years ago. With a removable 9 inch long steel pin similar to a knitting needle but infinitely pointier. And freshly basted in vegetal poison from her herbal garden. Several little items of variable shapes with cleverly hidden hinged blades, compartments for powders or pills and the large set of christian beads with a kitsch-sized metal crucifix on it that was actually a fragmentation & thermite grenade all found their ways to her large carpetbag.

One last pursing of the lips to insure that her gloss colors were still fresh, and Janet was out in the
vestibule, haranguing the poor porters to get a move on or it would be their hides if she missed her
lift-off time at the airport. Taking the four large suitcases, carry-on and burdened old lady down to
the car and out on the street took only six minutes because the elevator was a mite slow. The blue 4-
door sedan was a private family car with driver and security compliment of the UEO because of who
her husband was. Or maybe they didn't want to see an old CIA weapon loose in the streets; that had
never really been clear in the chatter the office reported back to her.

It took a bit under 40 minutes in the early evening traffic of New Cape Quest to reach the military
alliance's secured airfield, right on the oceanic beachline. The car drove all the way through the
checkpoint then to the two storey terminal to stop directly under the car port for VIP passengers. The
old lady got out of the car followed by the two men in dark blue suits that would be accompanying
her on her trip to Los Angeles. They piled up the entire mass of luggage on a convenient flatbed
dolly to wheel everything into the terminal then onto the plane itself. Since this flight was an internal
trip using a private plane, they didn't have to go through customs nor wait in line with others. The
team breezed through at high speed, forcing people to move out of their way as they marched.

Once out of the terminal on the tarmac side of the building, they only had about 20 feet to walk to
reach the old gray hulled propeller plane. The vehicle was an old airframe from 1957 that had been
renovated extensively, including a wet bath stall, mini-kitchenette and four fold-down bunks that
could be closed up to leave the lower bunks as a pair of 3-seat couches. Aside the 2 piloting chairs in
front, there were still eight of the original seventeen passenger seats and two slots for large
wheelchairs in case sick or elderly people were to be flown somewhere. All the luggage would go
into the cargo hold at the very tail-end of the plane, which was accessible from the inside of the
vehicle, by the door in the walking space between the washroom and galley kitchen counter.

(Eastern America; 19:48pm)

(Western America; 16:48pm)

Janet marched straight to her usual seat, the very first one on the left side so she could either read,
talk on the phone or sleep without the pilots' chatter bothering her. She liked the plane as a
conveyance but wasn't an engineering buff like her husband who insisted on talking to the pilots for
a long stretch of each flight they took. She loved the man, but God could he be a motormouth when
he got rolling! The two security men from the UEO finished storing all cargo in the hold and pulled
up the boarding ramp that closed up tightly as part of the fuselage once locked.

The pilots were already on comms with the tower, confirming they were ready to taxi to the runway
and leave for their planned trip westward. They received instructions to wait for ten minutes more
until a large UEO jet-copter that had landed was tracted to a side hangar for repairs as the pilot had
reported mechanical problems and didn't want to fly his bird with those indicators flashing the sorts
of troubles he had. After around 9 minutes, the tower contacted them to allow taxiing to the end of
the tarmac where powerful colored lights mounted atop slim steel poles glowed yellow to indicate the
runway was reserved but aircraft were not in movement yet. As they arrived in place, the tower
informed them they had the following ten minutes flat to take off or signal a failure so they could get
towed away to clear the strip for the next departure.

At exactly 20:15pm the plane began rolling along the takeoff runway, then seconds later was
airborne, heading due west towards Los Angeles and a long overdue meeting with an old friend that
had an affinity for secrets, intrigue and betrayals. It would be good to see Henrietta after so many
months apart. She was her best client after all, buying so many poisons every year that she practically
kept her in business all by herself.

Well no, not really, but it's the thought that counts.
Still, it would be good to be back in the field, slitting throats and stabbing backs, instead of rotting away in the depths of Langley's basements. Her cases were cold, yes, but not her corpse! She wasn't dead yet, thank you so very much for asking! Anyways, with the 'Noah's Ark' protocol in play, even the director of the CIA would be happy to see her at large, making a mess of Trump's plans like a wild dog in a bowling alley. Now, if she could help Hetty to get her old Vietnam days gang back together, they'd really be in business! Speaking of business...

"Ooooh, boys!" the elderly woman shouted over the noise of the twin engines, "I have a few pastries I packed for the trip... Would any of you like a small mocha cake? They go down real well with a good spot of tea." she simpered at the hired help, trying to foist her toxic produce on them.

Receiving four flat stares in response, the grand-mother shrugged, waving a negligent hand towards them. "You wouldn't be worth keeping around if you let yourselves be had by such a basic trick." Janet spoke authoritatively, then added under her breath "I'll just have to sweeten the deal a mite..."

The two security guards exchanged looks with the two flight crew silently then each went back to his personal business of studiously ignoring the 'Typhoid Mary' in the back lest she actually manage to tempt them with her indigestible baked 'not goods'. Now, if they could just figure out a way to occupy the woman until LA, they'd be golden.

The outsiders who care

( NCIS - LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 19:29pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 16:29pm

NCIS west coast - Office of Special Projects

Los Angeles, California, USA

LAPD liaison officer Martin Deeks was looking for someone particular as he prowled the central square of the Office of Special Projects' secret compound. Given the woman's status and physique, you'd think finding their erstwhile boss would be easier than that, especially since normally she was always in the way when you wanted privacy to run your op. Most of what they did worked better in the cool, unseen shadows under the radar of human senses, not under the glaring lights of public institutions and state management. They were called 'black ops' for a reason, dammit!

"Hidoko! Harley, my dear..." Deeks began with his best roguish smile that was unfortunately offset by the fatigue circles under his eyes and the tense, stressed set of his shoulders. All of which were too subtle for the average civilian, but an experienced field agent like Harley Hidoko could spot it a mile away, and know the cause too. She sympathized with Deeks and his fiancé Kensi, but not enough to put her head on the block unless it helped the extended NCIS group's long term missions; survival and maintaining of society's laws.

"Why if it isn't the blond wonder himself... How did you slip your leash this time? I thought that with Hetty back in the complex for a few months, you'd be more, what's the word...? 'regulated', I believe is the term?" she snarked at him playfully as she actually liked the amicable man. He was good company for an after-work drink and a serious, steady partner in the field, plus he had a decent enough personality, when you got passed the quirks. Strangely enough, he was male but more quirky than Kensi; go figure?

"Well my dear, if you must insist on wounding me to the quick so, I am actually trying to do things
by the book, this time around. It's just that the persons whose book I'm trying to follow aren't here to be warned, let alone have their opinions asked. Would you by any chance have seen our dear beloved Lider Minimo? And the bigger boss? I need to speak with Hetty and Mosley before we leave for the evening, since we aren't coming back."

Suddenly, Deeks made a face as he winced at his own choice of words. "Ouch! That did not come out right... We are coming back, just so you know, but the mission could take weeks or months, and force us to travel beyond Vancouver or even to other countries. That's what I meant by not coming back, that once were packed and ready, we'll go straight to the airfield, not... come back... here... to the office..."

Smiling wickedly at her male colleague's unease, Hidoko answered gibly "I'm pretty sure you weren't warning me that you are both eloping, deserting, passing to the enemy or planning a coup d'état to kill off Hetty to take her 'throne' from her."

The face Marty made at THAT thought made Harley laugh out loud; the young man's features had gone so pale that the bags under his eyes stood out in stark contrast to his usually tanned fair skin, and even his blond shaggy hair seemed to have gone dead and inert around his head. With vacant eyes that seemed to look at the very source of all horrors known to Mankind, the police detective whispered in dread "If ever Hetty thinks that of me, please kill me right away; the alternatives she would come up with don't bear considering. Like, never, ever, consider them. Please! Say you will!" he begged comically with his hands joined in front of him while the black-skinned female agent was leaning on the desk next to her to steady herself as she shook with laughter at his antics.

'Gods, but this boy was good for a healing laugh or a smile', Hidoko thought to herself. No wonder Kensi had grabbed him when he was available; she would have too, if she'd known him earlier.

Finally straightening from her bout of hilarity, Harley chuckled as she tried to answer the initial question he had asked. "You know you could have asked Eric or Nell? They would find the bosses faster than me. Anyways, you are in luck, my friend! I just left them in the armory, where Shay was arguing with Hetty about all the extremely sharp, and odd, weaponry she has accumulated in there over the years. Apparently, Shay's not convinced that there is such a need for that many sharp hard steel implements of that many varieties. And of course, she thinks the display cases are more than a mite 'ostentatious' to have in place like that."

The mien the LAPD detective made was a mixture of intrigue, fear and resignation as he palmed his face, shaking his head in the process. "Will they never learn?" he asked in strained tones, "Any time you question Hetty about her weapons, she tests them out on you to prove 'the point' of just how useful they are." he told Hidoko with a teasing smirk as he made air quotes around 'the point'.

The female agent tried to swat the man's biceps with a slow backhand, just because that was the appropriate answer to that kind of bad, worn out military pun, then made shooing gestures with both hands, telling him to hustle away before the bosses moved around the building again. As if summoned by a spell, Mosley walked out of the narrow corridor leading to the washrooms and rear staircase from the basement armory, on her way up to her office on the mezzanine.

Seeing together the two agents least likely to conspire a common plot against her, she walked over to them curiously, especially when Deeks' only reaction to her presence was to set his hands in his pockets, some stress bleeding out of his posture as she neared them. Looking to her longtime subordinate and friend Hidoko with an open, inviting face, Shay asked simply "Is everything alright? There is a big job coming up later tonight, when we move some of our agents' families to safer, less isolated locales. I do hope there isn't a sudden problem..." she left off, hoping that Harley would fill her in.
To her surprise, it was Deeks who answered. "Actually, I was asking Hidoko here if she had seen our dear beloved mini and big bosses, and there you are, just like she said she saw you. If you have five minutes, there is a collateral situation that you need to be briefed about. Kensi will talk about it with Hetty later on." The male detective spoke in clearly tired, softer tones than he normally did; his body had begun to show signs of persistent fatigue and lack of recuperation. It was a good thing the couple would be going home for the night then go to the airport directly in the early morning before rush hour. If any such period existed anymore, after the so-called 'presidential address' they had all been subjected to.

Gazing deeply into the man's blue eyes, she saw a guarded, injured soul, but no adversity or dishonesty, so she nodded at him openly, putting on her 'professional smile #3' while pointing up at her glass-walled office. "Will upstairs be good enough? It's a bit small and feels like a fish tank, but it's homey in its own way." she teased him cordially, knowing that Deeks was always more consciously careful of her rank and position in NCIS than the actual agents. In a way, it felt good, and flattered her, that he was so clearly deferential in publicly acknowledging she was actually Henrietta Lange's superior officer, but on the other it also felt painfully weird that an outsider, a local cop liaison at that, was more polite and respectful towards her than her own agents. Swallowing her renewed bile at that thought, she smiled a bit more at his agreeing nod that he emphasized by gesturing that he would follow her up.

After both giving Hidoko a little farewell, the two agents climbed the decorative main stairs up to the mezzanine and the glass enclosure that had become so important in the last year. Mosley walked around the desk to sit in her own chair comfortably but didn't bat an eye when Deeks chose to remain standing, hands still in his pants pockets as if nothing important was happening. The detective was neutral faced as he looked around the small room with mild passive interest at the sparse furnishings she kept in the cubic compartment. She had little emotional attachment to the office as she moved around the Pacific theater at least once a month to visit some of the NCIS facilities under her jurisdiction and she had a reserved room in each. Although, this was the only building she had to commit actual construction to establish herself. The old structure was a bit tighter than she liked her facilities to be and everything was already crammed with everybody else's stuff.

"So, detective Deeks, what was it you wanted to speak with me about? Do I need to close the security shutters for this?" she queried mildly, almost certain the subject wasn't life altering.

Shaking his head negatively as he concentrated on her, Deeks replied aloud "Nahn, it's just mostly personal stuff, no nut'tin to use the SCIF lockdown for. We had a situation about a half hour ago, in OPS, when the people from DXS that are going on mission with us tomorrow called to ask for a favor. One of them has a civilian dependent just like Kensi and I do; her 50-something mother, and she needed to find a safe place to stash her during our out-of-country duty. So, we invited her to bunk with Roberta and Julia over at our house. After that, we set up some inter-agency cooperation to remotely monitor each other's houses, vehicles and day jobs, that way if there's an emergency we got two armed options to help instead of just one."

Shay leaned backwards into her chair, steepling her fingers in front of herself, looking at Deeks' face, trying to decipher his motivations through his body language. Except she was getting nothing other than the stress he felt when mentioning their mothers being left alone during what was essentially the onset of a civil war. Since that stress was like background noise on an old analog TV set, it created 'snow' that hid the real program behind it, blocking her reading of him. That, plus the fact detective Deeks was normally very good at keeping up a fake smile through adversity and putting out false signals to hide his true state from hostiles. He was one of the few 'better' undercover operatives she had seen outside of federal agencies during her career in the intelligence apparatus.

"Well, that's interesting to know, that there are still people in this town who believe in the virtues of
human decency and community without first looking at your skin color, gender, age or religion. We seem to be in short supply of that, recently." she quipped in dark humor. "However, I fail to see how this concerns NCIS - Pacific or myself. Am I missing something, detective Deeks?" she probed more directly to get at the bottom of this.

Martin sighed deeply as he ran a hand wearily through his long blond hair, giving the top of his head a vigorous scratch at the same time. Leaning over, he placed both hands on the front of Mosley's desk to support his weight while he spoke with the woman that nobody in the building really knew anything about. She was an outsider; just like he still was after all these years and being engaged to Kensi.

"Look, Director Mosley, I know I am just a low-tier LAPD detective who was assigned as the NCIS liaison agent because the guys at the precinct were sick of my face and, for some unholy reason of her own nefarious designs, Hetty actually wanted to keep me around. Like a tagless lost puppy she dragged in the house. To run inhumane, illegal biological experiments on it away from prying eyes. But you didn't hear that from me, no sirree! Ya didn'na hear ta'at un from me!" he joked to set the other person at ease with him. He didn't want an adversarial or suspicious relationship with this woman, he simply didn't know how to say it aloud. Yet. The inspiration would come.

Trying to hide a widening of her smile, Mosley moved her fingers from steepled to interlaced and set her elbows on the chair's armrests, a bit more at ease since Deeks was cracking his infamous off colored humor with her. He tended to do that either to cover the fact he was more nervous than his auditor or because... Well, he was a guy... Did men really need an excuse to be weird or crass in their jokes at the expense of people?

"They will trust you. Not now, probably not soon, but they will trust you. Eventually. It's just you're a distant figure to them; the 'regional' manager, not the person whose gonna sit by their bed in the hospital if they get banged up bad enough to be crippled or maimed for life, like Hetty has done, and will do again, as long as she leads OSP. Give them, and especially yourself, the time to do this right. You deserve their trust, I know you do, but you also deserve to earn it the hard, solid way, so they can't doubt you anymore. They'll second guess you, they do that to everybody as that's a basic survival necessity of undercover life, to never accept materials, events, or people, at first contact, but they will eventually doubt you no more than the other people in the compound."

Shay' face had turned to stone at his words. She had no idea where he came off saying things like that to her, even if he weren't condescending or sucking up, because these were her deepest thoughts, the most recurrent fears and limitations in her daily life; the systematic distrust and passive-aggressive resistance of Callen, Hanna, Kolcheck, Beal, Jones and even several of the lower tier employees of the building. Hidoko had even gotten caught up in the movement a few times in the several months they had been based out of Los Angeles to oversee the situation with Hetty's disappearance in Vietnam and subsequent return. That this simple beat cop could read her thoughts and raw emotions set her on edge and she now wondered what his angle or game were.

Deeks shook his head negatively, his face showing tiredness and weariness that few people ever saw as he usually kept it far more wrapped-up. Straightening his stance and taking his hands out of their pockets, he stood there for a few seconds, contemplating the older woman before nodding firmly once as he came to a decision. Surprising the regional manager with his action, Marty slowly walked around the desk to stand besides Shay then leaned back until his thighs touched the desk's rim and he settled his butt down on the edge carefully, making certain the glass plate could actually hold his weight. The thick tempered glass didn't so much as make a noise as he sat, so he relaxed and gifted the black skinned female a short lived boyish grin before his face became worn and tired again. Mosley had unlaced her hands to grip the armrests of her chair, preparing to defend herself. Deeks had never been disrespectful towards her, nor aggressive, but after Trump's heinous speech and the
law changes he was advocating to get done, no black person, nor any woman, could simply let down their guard around a white man anymore.

Marty saw the tension and defensive posture in the person he was speaking with and sighed despondently; he understood all too well her reasoning and didn't blame her, but it hurt anyways that somebody could think of him that way. At least it wasn't Sam. That would hurt a lot more than he was ready to admit, even to himself, after all the years they had worked together. Inhaling a deep, steadying breath, Deeks looked straight into Shay's eyes and said:

"I am an outsider, just like you. That's who I am to speak to you like that, about those things. Because they keep me up at night too, just like you. Because after almost 9 years of working together, of stress, of bleeding, getting shot, getting tortured and losing people together, they still see me as just the bothersome lightweight LAPD tag-along. I was kidnapped and tortured besides them, but I was alone in my side, separate from them even when we were in the same room. We faced biological weapons together, but I was alone when came time to clean up and write the reports cuz they had 'classified navy stuff' to do about what we just lived. Even the mission to Vietnam to rescue Hetty was a pain in my firmly toned ass cuz Sam, G and even Kensi kept talking about navy intel and CIA secrets so dark they felt the need to shove me to the other side of the room, or send me to bother the pilots of the plane, so they could talk between them without 'breaking protocol'. Even under enemy fire, even in the depth of enemy territory with the same risks and the same goals at stake, with my fiancé being one of 'them' from the start, I am still an outsider to them. That is why I can speak about those things that hurt you so deep, when you think nobody is watching you."

Director Mosley's face had turned as immobile as sculpted onyx at his words, but softened as she heard the words and the genuine emotional conflicts and suffering they revealed. The young man had expressed to her things than she realized he could never reveal to anybody, not even Kensi Blye, because then any chance he had to somehow become 'one of them' for real would be shot for good. Closing her deep black eyes for a few seconds, Shay wondered how, after nine years, could this kind, caring man still be caring and straining so much to help a group of people so hermetically tight together that even the repeated trauma of sustained street fights, shootings, bombings and torture at enemy hands couldn't make them more trusting, more open to him. 'I am an outsider' he said, so honestly, and so clearly hurt by it. That even his fiancée treated him that way instinctively, without realizing the hurt she inflicted upon him... What kind of cult was this team, that they could hold ranks so brutally against a person who was well and truly 'one of them' by any definition she could come up with?

"I am sorry for your pain. I didn't know they were that way with others, especially not in their own team. I honestly thought they were better people than to be so segregated like this." Mosley spoke softly, her level tone of voice soothing the man's frayed nerves in such a way that it was visible in how his posture seemed to sag and a certain tension left his shoulders. He was now looking down at his hands, laying open on his lap; big, strong, calloused from hard work and shooting a pistol so often... And trembling from the repressed anger, shame, fury, despair and fears... God Above, so many fears...

Shay could now read the young detective like an open book and wished dearly that she couldn't. After so many times where he had come out of firefights swinging with a cheesy quip or deleterious pun, she had lost track of the fact he was simply human, like them all, and had limits too, no matter how far or strong they were compared to the average person. It seemed that they had finally managed to find those limits after all, and she wasn't happy to be the one to do so. This man had given too much already for the cause and the country; he deserved better than what he received in return. She deserved better too, in point of fact, and that was what he was trying to tell her; that he knew, he understood, and while he couldn't change the others, he would help her in the small ways that he could.
Marty huffed an annoyed sigh, making a face so weird for a second that she was unable to name the emotions displayed, so many they had been. Passing a shaking hand over his drawn features, the blond cop exchanged a weak smile with his 'nominal' superior while on NCIS missions and territory, understanding her incomprehension all too much, and needing her supporting words far more than he wanted to admit.

Swallowing passed the lump in his throat, Marty spoke out in hushed tones. "Don't hate them. Life has hurt them often, from a very young age, leaving deep scars and precious few people who can actually honestly understand what they did or endured to stay alive this long. To them, it's a deeply ingrained instinct that only someone with a similar past and life can possibly relate and judge them fairly. And you would be surprised to know just how afraid of being judged 'abnormal', 'incomplete', 'substandard', 'human waste' or 'monstrous' they all are. They all have blood and misery on their hands... Far more than I have, even with some stuff I did undercover for LAPD. I didn't know for real what human depravity was until I started working alongside NCIS, and I only understood its depth since two years ago, when a man put a power drill in my mouth to core out my molar. We've seen biological weapons, humans trafficked and enslaved, ritual murders, mass shootings every other week and so on. They have the worse, crappiest job there is in law enforcement; the last thing they deserve is to have their own colleagues judging them harshly."

Gazing deeply in the eyes of her coworker, Shay answered in measured words: "They certainly don't make things easy for anyone trying to get close to them. I have been here almost a year and they have spent more time trying to convert Hidoko, who is officially my personal adjutant, to their little clique than putting in any effort to accept me. It's actually been worse since Hetty's return. There were a few times when I though Callen was going to come out and say to my face to leave 'Her territory' or I would disappear down the sewer line with a second smile under my chin. He has such a way of brightening a woman's day, that one. I can see why you keep him around; for lifting the mood on dreary days." She smiled a bit herself when Deeks began to huff out a low chuckle at her jest.

Wiping a tear of laughter from his left eye, Marty chuffed out "Really, woman? Callen as comedy relief with this outfit? In what reality do you see that? Cuz even with a Jamaican joint and a bottle of Jack in me, I can't see that happening. Maybe I need glasses... for some different sort of booze! Eh eh eh!" The male was laughing softly now, a crooked half-smile on his scruffy bearded face. After a few minutes to get his breath back, Marty gave her a more genuine smile, but still had that feel of tiredness and depression to him that had haunted him since his return from the afternoon recovery run.

Looking down at his hands, the policeman asked in a gentle tone "When will you tell them about all the square footage you've been buying around town over the last couple of years? Those big old decrepit warehouses and factories along the rail tracks just before the triage yards at the container docks cost you a pretty penny. It would be a shame to let it all waste away cuz of a 'misunderstanding' between good people."

Making a face of disappointment at herself, Shay asked aloud "Just how in God's name did you become aware of my little real estate ventures, Deeks? I don't recall taking out an advertisement in the papers, not that anybody reads those anymore. I made all the purchases before I had an office in LA, through an anonymous shell corporation, and used an agent who was a Secret Service agent alongside of me when we were based at the USSS offices in San Francisco. He retired from the service after an injury in the field, two years before I transferred to NCIS, so I know it wasn't him that blabbed. Where did you find the informations about the buildings I was buying?"

Deeks gave his normal smirk that showed he was happy he'd broken open the case for the team. It had been a big gamble for him to broach the touchy secretive subject, but her response both
confirmed everything he found out, and lacked any aggressivity towards him, which was always a good thing.

"I have been a Los Angeles police detective for 10 years, since I was 25 years old; they don't hand out these badges in cereal boxes, you know. Plus, I have been a lawyer, public defender, between ages 22 to 25, and I keep abreast of legal changes every year to help the team with judicial and political problems. I even have my Bar Association membership card validated every year, even though I haven't pleaded in court in a decade. That is in fact the biggest reason I'm being sent up to Canada to fetch our runaway scientist. I still have a whole lot of friends and contacts from my law years around City Hall, and a few people may have mentioned to me that my new Big Boss was seen in the real estate permits bureau carrying out certain very large yet secretive land grabs in the previous years. Since these never got leaked to the media, and no apparent development or renewal has been spotted on those lots, well, some people have asked me questions about what was happening. Thusly, I was made aware and did my own discrete investigation into what you bought, and how, and especially why."

Mosley leaned back in her chair, tilting her head to the ceiling with her eyes closed as a groan of deep annoyance escaped from her. Passing a tired hand over her face, she shook her head in admission of defeat, conceding that there were some damned good reasons WHY this man had been chosen by Hetty Lange as the liaison officer with LAPD. The fact he could be aware of her secret land grab years before he even knew of her or had any direct interactions with her was exactly the sort of foresight and planning abilities that her regional management team needed desperately. If Deeks weren't so badly necessary on this mission, she wouldn't let him go. Unfortunately, they didn't have any other person in hand that combined legal expertise, law enforcement and enough field combat training to make an effective bodyguard at the same time. This young man really was a rarity, and a precious commodity for her department; not one that NCIS director Leon Vance would thank her for losing, if he ever decided to take a hike to another job.

Opening one eye to glare at Marty who still had his grin firmly plastered on his face, she asked in sudden concern: "Have you told anybody about this? I was never asked about it, and I would have expected Hetty or Nell, at least, to come interrogate me."

Marty's face became sober again, taking on a neutral reflexive mask that Shay knew so well for having looked at it many times when dealing with politicians in every town hall or state capital she visited during her tenure. Taking a few seconds to form an answer, Deeks sighed before speaking.

"It was about four years ago that I first got wind of some unnamed 'heavy hitter' buying out large abandoned, and flat-out condemned, industrial property in the very critical sector just abutting the shipping container transfer docks in the sea port district. They were using a shell corporation, which is legal, but got my attention on a gut feeling. On top of being clustered right next to each other like eggs in a dozen, every lot bought had railway spurs or loading quays along the tracks for direct use of the cargo & passenger trains that pass there several times daily. There was another peculiar thing that grabbed my gut too; these warehouses and manufacturing buildings were all old, too obsolete to use for the purpose of safely mass producing goods anymore, not without rebuilding the things from the ground up. Plus, several of the old carcasses had been used by street gangs to produce or distribute drugs and explosives for their street vendors, so they were contaminated so bad that many were actually seized by the city, and under a warrant of obligatory demolition and decontamination before the land got sold back to the public."

Looking Shay in the eye, Deeks continued "The intriguing thing though, was that even those dangerous structures weren't taken down; instead, great pains were taken inside of just one year to decontaminate all of them from the inside out, rebuild the strength and solidity in the walls and floors, armor the doors and windows with bars and storm shutters tighter than a bank vault. In the last three
years, almost every building had tool trucks and workers buzzing around like bees making a hive, but no news in the papers or social medias, the chamber of commerce, the industrial associations, the landowner's association, or the California Registrar of Corporations. You don't put in army-grade ventilation, electrical, plumbing and create an inner lining of steel plates held upright by steel 'I' beams just for the trip of it. Somebody was building a series of war shelters in town since Trump got elected, and then you get dropped on us like a carpet bombing from a B52. And about as subtle, too."

Making a face of utter disgust, Director Mosley gestured vaguely with her left hand, "Okay, what else did you find out? And how, if you please? And why aren't you panicking about all this, anyways?"

Marty snorted amused, directing a genuine smile towards the older woman. "The 'Noah's Ark' protocol was started when I was already working with NCIS for a year. It didn't take me long to trace the source of the dummy corp's cashflow back to slush-funds in Singapore that were receiving the profits from judicial seizures of drug smugglers' assets by NCIS – PAC. From that, to the types of people involved in the reconstruction and the types of renovations... Everything said 'government war shelter' if you knew what to look for."

Shay stood up from her chair, crossing her arms over her chest, and gave the man an appreciative eye for his incredible piece of investigative work at her expense. Just as she was about to compliment him for a job truly well done, and correct conclusions to boot, her office door was rudely opened without anybody knocking first."

"Agent Blye." Mosley said frostily as she turned a gimlet eye toward the two women in her door. "This isn't the parish church; you knock and wait for permission before coming in. Is that clear?" she ordered in frigid tones that jolted the female agent into stopping her actions dead in her tracks.

Hetty Lange however was not so concerned; her face was completely neutral and her words carefully measured as she walked into the square glass-walled office to stand by the outer wall that overlooked the open central area of the main floor below. Joining her hands behind her back as she faced towards Mosley and Deeks, she queried: "Is there something amiss, officer Deeks? You have seemed somewhat out of sorts, since returning from the recovery mission this afternoon."

As Kensi frowned interrogatively, trying to figure out what this aside was about while imagining how to answer Mosley without tanking her job in the drain, Marty and Shay exchanged a look and understood full well what the Mini Boss was doing. She was coming in from the left field to catch either Deeks or Mosley unawares so she could fish around for information. Well, not this time. Marty wasn't in the mood to play charades with his Lider Minimo today, not with the day he had, or the mission coming up.

Still sitting calmly on Mosley's desk, Marty casually asked back "Hum? Have I? I don't feel weird or out of sorts. Do I look out of sorts to you, Director Mosley? I mean, we seemed to be having a pretty calm, ordinary conversation about containers and rail freight services just now. I didn't sense anything going 'amiss' here; did you?" He asked the black skinned woman in friendly tones while winking at her with his right eye which neither of the others were positioned to see move.

Shay sat back comfortably in her chair, swiveling a bit to the right to face toward Kensi, thus committing a symbolic snub against Hetty who was higher ranking, and already standing behind Marty in line with his left side elbow, putting her in Shay's established line of sight if she hadn't moved. Making a smile similar to a cat that got the canary and dipped it in cream before eating it, the NCIS Pacific Region Director commented airily: "Agent Blye. I understand from detective Deeks that you have established a new arrangement for your mothers at home. Good. I hope for you that it
works out well. In light of this, it won't be necessary for you to return here at OSP. You can spend the night at home with your parents then go to John Wayne Airport with the DXS team to settle in the plane and keep it safe until your take off. I would appreciate that you log a call-in with Operations at each major step of the road to make certain your are all safe and progressing according to plan."

Marty stood from his relaxed sitting position on the edge of the desk, putting his hands in his pockets as he moved to his feet. Giving the mature woman a roguish smirk he nodded at her. "Thanks a bundle for your understanding Director. We'll be getting on the road now, have a few pit stops to do before we can crash for the night."

The detective gently took his fiancée by the arm, guiding her away from the glassed office as they heard the voice of Shay Mosley telling Hetty to sit as she had to update her on the preparedness level of her agency in Los Angeles.

Unwanted guests

(JAG – opening theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 19:50pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 16:50pm

SeaQuest DSV 6000; Deck-C; Parking silo #3

Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean, near Florida

Nathan Hale Bridger still wore his day uniform as he stood at parade attention with his hands loosely joined behind his back. The passive uncaring expression on his face belied the unmitigated scorn he felt for what was on the other side of the metal valve.

Coming back from the UEO destroyer Everglades SFA-3094 (Surface Fleet Asset) was their very own MR-class shuttle #3, carrying personnel than he would never of his own free will accept aboard his boat, if it were just his choice. Ship captains were judged quite harshly by what cargo and passengers they ferried, not just how they handled their crewmen. And the people coming would not help his reputation in any way, especially with what they had tried to use the SeaQuest to commit. They were the cause of all this mess, and Nathan would quite happily see them thrown kicking and screaming in the plasma furnace like debris, if only he could get it done legally. Giving a cursory look at the four armed security sailors arrayed around him and Manilow Crocker near the blast-door controls, he didn't see anything out of order so he gave the command to process the airlock open.

Chief of security Crocker activated the airlock to permit entry inside the actual living space of the ship. The hydraulic hatch that gave access to shuttle parking silo #3 on the other side of the thick armored bulkhead unlocked and opened, the two layers of the protective valve sliding away from each other, recessing into the walls on each side of the door frame.

Coming in from the dried out silo was a pair of security sailors wearing body armor, helmets with cameras and lights, and each had a belt full of weapons to complement the pulse rifle in their hands. Following them were two bedraggled humans dressed in orange jumpsuits restrained by a complex system of 6-point shackles that forced them to walk slowly, with precarious steps, like elderly people suffering from very bad arthritis in their legs. Behind them were another pair of armored sailors and at the very back was the senior officer in charge of the transfer.

Nathan looked over the two prisoners as they were placed side-by-side in front of him for inspection;
he wasn't anymore pleased now than back a few hours ago, when he was told of his first official
critical-level mission since returning to active duty.

Lawrence Wolenczak and Cynthia Holtzenstein.

The depraved defective retards who had tried to illegally and immorally use the UEO's flagship as a
private juvenile jail for their own criminal deeds against their already victimized son. Nathan could
only imagine what his wife Carol would have done to them, if she were still alive to witness this.
God knew that if Nathan was ever blessed with caring for a child again, he certainly wouldn't beat,
maim, and try to murder him like these two did.

Walking around the stationary prisoners and escorts came general Sarah Mackenzie, head of the
UEO's military police for the African Continent and surrounding waters. She was dressed in the
usual beige uniform that looked like a 2-piece business suit that had been standardized by the higher
brass across all services. Opening the slim briefcase she carried, she took out and passed over a trio
of paper files to Bridger for his evaluation. It was noted by all sailors present that the file jackets were
black with white lettering on them.

Black Ops mission warrants.

Exchanging looks between themselves discretely, the junior sailors understood clearly that the two
prisoners would not be leaving the ship alive. Although, at the end, they would probably be very
happy to not keep on living anymore; not with what they would suffer in the coming days.

"Alright, general Mackenzie. We have them. Is there anything else we can do for you?" asked
Bridger in curt tones as what he anticipated the black files to contain was turning his stomach.

"Not really captain Bridger. But, I would appreciate a private cabin for the rest of the day, to have a
rest and an early dinner before my return transport arrives, later this evening. We will be meeting
with another of the fleet's surface combatants that is bringing you somebody eager to finally meet
these two reprobates face-to-face. Until then, I will simply stand aside quietly, or maybe tour the boat
a bit out of curiosity." the female general answered pleasantly. She didn't see Nathan and his crew as
enemies, only as tools unwittingly used by others without their consent. She would not make the
mistake of antagonizing them or lobbing them in the same basket as these errors of nature.

"Well then; we have a free VIP cabin on deck-A for such occasions. I'm sure you will find it far
more accommodating than where this pair will be lodging soon." Nathan replied glibly as he
gestured Crocker to have everything squared away promptly. He now needed to go to his cabin to
read through these three files to decide the best course of action not only for his crew, but for the
UEO and USA as well. Why did he take up this job again? He was so peaceful on his island...

State of the Dis-Union

(Lord of the Rings – Uruk Hai theme)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 21:43pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 18:43pm

United States of America; All over the country

The large black SUV was rolling quickly enough to clear out of any scuffles they might encounter;
the mission was recon & delivery, not search & destroy to steal enemy secrets. Causing their genuine
desire to avoid confrontation unless they were attacked, the SUV containing Jack Dalton, Angus
MacGyver and Wilt Bozer was being followed closely by the very vulnerable small brown
hatchback coupe ridden by Riley Davis and Diane Hessop. With their forces and fighting capacities split asymmetrically between two purely 'civilian' vehicles, meaning they weren't mission-rated in any ways, all five persons felt a sense that things could go really bad in a blink, if they stopped movement long enough for an armed event to happen. They could NOT allow themselves to get bogged down in a firefight with anything, not with Riley and her mom obliged to ride in a separate vehicle due to all the food, valuables and personal necessities that were stored in each transport for what was essentially a 're-homing' of the older woman for the foreseeable term.

After rolling for a very stressful hour and a half from MacGyver's house, the DXS convoy arrived in the neighborhood they desired. By common accord established before they had left, the two cars did a drive-by of a perimeter two city blocks wide all around of their destination house, so they could see with their own eyes the situation. It was imperative they know what kind of unrest and criminality had encroached in the sector to prepare their families to fight it on their own, once the active agents were away for their out-of-country mission. Given the sociopolitical situation in the USA, it wasn't like they could put it off in hopes that everything calmed down on its own without external intervention anymore.

After doing the perimeter safety survey, they slowed down to approach the target house. The front lawn was the full width of the property, but only about a dozen feet deep from the sidewalk. The front of the house was composed of the main home, which was a 30 foot x 90 foot rectangle, with the thinner side oriented towards the street. It was two storeys high plus a gambrel roof that looked bulky enough to have another full second floor under the dormers and rafters. In fact, there was a cement cavity with a wrought iron banister in the front yard that indicated a staircase towards a sizable basement, a 20' wide by 5' deep balcony on the first floor with straight stairs coming down to the ground, and another 10' by 5' deep balcony at the second floor, for a total of 4 usable levels. The large garage was attached directly to the house but set back about 20 feet from the façade, thus leaving enough driveway for 4 outside parking slots on top of the 4 internal slots. The garage had two visible storeys, indicated by the two wide vehicle doors on the ground level, and regular household windows with a 20' wide by 5' deep balcony on the first floor. The garage rooftop seemed to be flat, with decorated french doors allowing passage between it and the level under the roof of the main house edifice. There was also a few pieces of upholstered wood and metal items jutting above the solid concrete wall that wrapped around the garage's rooftop, serving as a banister, indicating that the large flat space had been furnished as a functional terrace.

The entire ensemble was wide enough to leave just 10 feet of walkable safety pathway between the main structures and the 12 foot tall decorative wooden fence that made a 'U' shape around the property line. The open side faced towards the street and reached the sidewalk to fully separate from the neighbors, and wooden panels mounted on hinges served as locking doors to separate the publicly accessible front yard from the secluded private backyard.

As the DXS team gazed over the home, they could see that all the ground level windows had been shuttered solidly. Also, there were small plastic balls hanging under the top roof's soffits and all balconies, containing combinations of camera, lights and motion detectors. The shutters in the windows and doors were thick steel plates covered with small inch tall conical points to deter criminals from trying to shoulder-bash through the panels. The windows and balcony doors on the first floor and attic had decorative steel grills to keep out animals or thieves.

There were three distinct chimneys raising from the main roof and two from the garage. The topmost roof had six large arrays of specialty solar panels that produced electricity but also had built-in metal water pipes for a cheap, efficient, system to run hot water throughout the building. On the end of the roof towards the backyard rose a cluster of long thin metallic antennas while two different parabolic dishes had been affixed one to each chimney. Atop the tallest and thickest antenna pole in back, there
was even a 5 feet wide complex rotating device that looked like a horizontal '+', with small oval parabolic receptors at each end, and thin tall vertical flanges inside the angles of the arms.

The DXS crew contemplated the heavy security and impressive comms 'noise' being generated by the house that were being picked up by their own vehicle comms and portable scanners. They knew from having gotten pictures of the neighborhood through the Internex Mappe Mundia surveys that all the lots on the street were double-length, but the home itself was far bigger than expected for the pay grade both agents reported, which caused some questions. Both feds supposedly made roughly 65,000$ a year but the property was evaluated at close to 2,000,000$ (unfurnished) located in a 'bourgeois' neighborhood at least four social classes above where Angus and Wilt shared the house Mac had inherited from his grand-father. There was literally no comparing with the apartments Riley and Jack lived in, even if they weren't cheap.

As he gazed curiously over the face of the tall impressive residence, Mac dialed his cellphone to call agent Deeks to confirm he was present and ready to receive them. He got his answer both by the phone and the house's right-hand garage door flipping upwards into 'awning' position to let them roll into the enclosed structure. The 4-car garage was configured in 2 wide / 2 deep square plan with the two left-hand spots taken already, so Jack rolled his SUV forward a bit to let Riley drive her car into safety first, then he maneuvered behind her. The positions would allow their convoy to leave quickly later on without having to move the vehicles of the people staying in the house. This was important not only for efficiency, but for safety as well: less activity visible around the home made it less interesting for potential thieves or violent fanatics.

Several can lights built into the ceiling had automatically lit up as the motion detectors inside the mechanics bay reacted to ANY activity, and was also heard a soft beeping throughout the property to warn inhabitants that there was something going on inside the parking structure's ground level. From where he was, Jack could see three doors around the garage, located in the middle of each other side that wasn't the front. As the black SUV came to a stop, the engine finally quieting down, the thick wooden door, reinforced with a steel plate on the inside, swiveled downwards to close the garage against the increasingly hostile external world. Once the heavy panel was closed, it locked tightly by rows of mechanical pins that latched to the steel frame posts on each side. Now that they were shut in safely, Marty Deeks opened the house door that permitted passage between the car park and the main house; this one had a spiked plate on top similar to the shutters outside.

Upon seeing the LAPD detective, the DXS crew were surprised to see he was still wearing the same NCIS flak jacket and dark blue BDU's as he had in their communications earlier in the day. Seen from up close, there was now lots of grime and dull brown stains visible on the pant's legs and the cuffs of the shirt sleeves. The next thing they noticed were the two Beretta 92FS pistols with extended 30 shell mags, Modular Optical System atop the slide plus LED flashlight integrated to the casing under the muzzle, clenched tightly in his hands, aimed at the ground but ready for action nonetheless. As the young man walked slowly into the garage between the two cars belonging to his own group, he was carefully followed by agent Blye, also still dressed in stained dark blue BDU's and flak jacket, but holding at forward-low an Heckler & Koch HK416 – D10RS sub-compact assault rifle with silencer, red dot sight, 6 inch bayonet, 100 shell drum magazine and M203 grenade launcher attached under the barrel. She also had a SIG-Sauer P229 E2 pistol on each hip and several knives with multiple 40mm grenades in a bandoleer. While neither was openly aggressive, the heavy ordnance, heightened level of alertness and anxiety was palpable to all five visitors.

Then again, the DXS team wasn't composed of innocent civilians going out for a family stroll either; they had arrived with all four team members heavily armed. Jack and Angus each had a Sig Sauer P320 pistol with red dot sight, integrated flashlight and extended 30 shell mags holstered on their hip with many extra mags, and several combat knives. Both had their rifle of choice for the trip, the US Army's standard Colt M4-A1 assault rifle, fully kitted with ACOG sight, clipped flashlight, 6 inch
bayonet and M203 grenade launcher. However, their long guns were left inside the SUV as they stepped out. Wilt and Riley each had a Glock 17 pistol with red dot sight, integrated flashlight, and extra regular 15 shell mags holstered under their left shoulder, and several combat knives. Both had brought a Mossberg 930 Tactical semi-auto shotgun with tri-rails, Ghost Ring sight, laser pointer and fixed flashlight, also left in the cars. Diane was, for the first time of her life, carrying a swiss army knife gifted by MacGyver, a can of police-grade pepper spray from her daughter, and a Police Force 9,000,000* Tactical Stun Baton Flashlight gifted by Jack just today, all in her large purse.

The two teams took a long uneasy minute to look over each other before Marty secured the pistols in the holsters on his hips, which in turn had Kensi move to set her rifle on it's bandoleer across her back in carrying position. As the tension left the four expert combatants, Wilt, Riley and Diane breathed out a sigh of relief, while also internalizing just how on edge the NCIS people were. This was not just normal weariness towards newcomers, nor the result of stressing out for the current civil unrest in progress. They had gone through something harsh recently, to still be keyed-up so much.

Rubbing at the back of his neck with his left hand in embarrassment, Marty Deeks explained vaguely: "Sorry about the welcoming committee, people. We had a shit mission all morning, then we got to HQ just in time to hear that DC had taken leave of what little senses they had left, after voting for the fuhrer wannabee a second time. Honestly guys, the only piece of good news we got today was your proposal to have our three mothers share housing until we come back. Otherwise, this out-of-country mission would have been a nightmare for both of us. Kensi and I would like to thank you, for calling us with this offer, and for helping to organize it on your end."

Deeks finished his little speech by extending a welcoming hand to the closest person, which happened to be Bozer. The young black male gratefully accepted the hand of friendship, giving a strong honest grip in return that caused a spontaneous happy smile to appear on the detective's tired scruffy face for a few seconds.

"Don't sweat it, man," the younger man expressed with many guilty feelings showing, "I can't go over to my family to help them ride out this shit-storm, so anything I can do to help Diane or any other of our friends here is welcome. Being useless sucks, and our team doesn't do it well."

Kensi Blye rapped her knuckles on the hood of her dark blue SUV as she passed by it, a lot of the stress bleeding out of her face and posture as she extended her hand to Diane Hessop in welcome. After all the reassurances had been done, Roberta and Julia were called into the garage for short introductions before they got to the immediate work. The three mothers were sent inside the house proper to receive the storage stuff, while the two teams of pros worked quickly to pull from their vehicles whatever would stay in the house, then repacked all the mission necessities into Jack's black SUV for later when they would leave for the airfield.

They used the small mud room, located just inside the house through the connection door, as temporary buffer to quicken the unloading process, then began sorting where in the home to forward the varying bags and luggage. Diane's personal belongings were set apart as they discussed where she would bunk, since Roberta Deeks and Julia Feldman had spent last night in the two bedrooms next to the master suite on the first floor. That left available the in-law suite above the garage and the three guest bedrooms on the second floor available, if the teams decided to spend the night at home. Unless the DXS people preferred to bunk together, in which case there were hide-a-bed couches in the basement's game room.

The mature woman was a bit put-out to see all the perturbations her presence caused, especially when the couple's mothers were in the house as well. Diane claimed the other women had more right than her to the prime location that was the in-law suite but calmed down rapidly as she spoke with them. Roberta and Julia both wanted to be as close as possible to their adult children to compensate
for many lost years that were filled with many hardships for all of them. Even before they had been approached by DXS, their plan as a family had been to stay inside the main structure of the house to avoid isolating someone, even just by accident.

Trying to put Diane at ease about the situation, Roberta joked "Diane dear, if you insist we all be equals, maybe we should all move our stuff to the second storey then segregate it as 'mothers' floor'. We could even forbid access to any 'non-mothers' from then on."

Julia quipped playfully "As an extra incentive for such a move, don't forget about the large private terrace at that level, or how much more peaceful being away from the kids' noise will be."

It was a pair of very amused fiancés that leaned on each other as they laughed at the scene, while the disgruntled Jack Dalton was summarily drafted as a mule to take all of Diane's luggage up two flights of stairs by the main forward stairwell. Then the poor man had to do it twice again to help the 'poor old women' do the same afterwards, leaving the chuckling Angus, Wilt and Riley to move the long-term storage stuffs down to the basement lockers. Being the good caring people that they were, Kensi and Marty waited until much later, after their laughter had subsided, to tell their guests about the elevator at the back of the house near the kitchen.

{ SQ } - { Home base } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 22:20pm)

(Western America; 19:20pm)

With all the edible provisions they brought to help sustain the three mothers for a prolonged stay finally squared away, the weary warriors took some time to wash up before having a hot meal. The two NCIS agents changed out of their bloodied tactical clothes, opting for casual jeans and T-shirts with sneakers, but kept their sidearms belted on their hips visibly. Marty and Kensi were stressed out, tired from the long hellish day, almost ready to crash and wink out. The DXS team had taken a load off, splitting between the two newly vacated bedrooms on the first floor, in case they spent the night in place, but everyone really expected just a short nap of one or two hours before they traveled at night to the airport, as planned.

Inside the master bedroom, Marty hugged Kensi to his chest, putting his lips to her forehead in a gentle kiss, as he rested his arms around her loosely in a warm caring embrace. He breathed in deeply the smell of her shampoo, smiling as he remembered all the times they had shared the shower stall or the large soaker tub that were in their luxurious private en-suite. The young woman leaned forward into her lover's chest, nuzzling her face in the crook of his neck, trying to absorb as much of his loving warmth as she could in the brief moment of peace they could steal from the brutal day. After spending a few short minutes in silent emotional support to each other, they broke off to complete their tasks. When she finished, Kensi would go help the three fighters with any moving of cargo left to be done, while Marty accompanied the hacker to their office on the ground floor, where all their base-camp radio set-up to monitor the property was installed.

Walking just a few dozen feet past the elevator and rear stairs to reach the entry of the middle bedroom, Marty knocked on the door to get the attention of the occupants. The door was opened by Jack who was grinning ear-to-ear as he dried his wet hands with a thick brown towel. He hadn't changed out of his clothes since they were new from this afternoon and still clean, but splashing some water on his face had done wonders to ease some stress out of him.

"Howdie, man! I tell you, I have to thank you for lending us the room, even for just a few hours before we leave. This place sure is better than our plane's bunks, and it beats out all the cheap motels we have to crash at during missions. And that bed is so damned big! I could fit three of me in it!"
exclaimed the happy texan as he threw the towel over his shoulder to free his hands.

Deeks smiled more freely, his face losing a bit more of its weariness as he listened amusedly to the older man's excited babble. Slipping his hands in his jeans pockets, he shrugged nonchalantly as he answered: "Most of the furniture in the house was sold with it. The owners had it for close to thirty years but couldn't bring it with them when they moved out, so we haggled a deal. We got cheap stuff and they saved on storage fees, as well as getting a bit more than what a garage sale would have brought in. They were especially happy to avoid that hassle, I can tell you that."

The detective heard the sound of the bathroom shared with the second bedroom open and close, with the soft footsteps of Riley Davis coming towards them, muffled by the thick carpet. The young woman had also done a minimal wash-up, mostly to her face, hands and combing her hair. Her clear brown eyes zoomed in on the figure of the man in the doorframe the moment she was in line to see him, so she walked over to stand besides Jack.

Addressing the only female on the DXS team, Marty asked "Are you going to call-in to your base now or before we leave for the airport? We have a comms room set up to monitor around the house and neighborhood, to spot trouble before it reaches us. Maybe you'd like to connect with our gear to boost your signal for your call?"

Smiling at the generous offer, Riley nodded then quickly turned towards her side of the bedroom to fetch her work satchel and cellphone. "Yeah, thanks! That would be appreciated, especially since I don't know if our boss will be easily available, after what happened last evening in DC. She's supposed to be at some secret facility, but it's in spitting distance of the Capitol. Nobody knows what's happening inside the capital's perimeter anymore."

"They're flushing their marbles down the Potomac, is what they're doing, in case you were wondering..." quipped Deeks while flashing a bratty smirk at Jack who suddenly had a bad case of cough as he tried to suppress the bout of intense laughter that threatened to erupt.

"Ah ah ah," fake-laughed Riley sarcastically, even though her smirk was quite genuine. "I can see that childish humor and cheap-shot jokes is a common affliction of all blondies the world over. I'll have to confirm this for Matty, so she stops trying to have MacGyver see a shrink for his 'little problem'." she snarked at the detective as she walked back to the bedroom doorway.

Jack lost his battle of self-restraint, exploding in garrulous laughter as the door at the end of the corridor opened to let Angus and Wilt out of the front bedroom. While the middle room was smaller and had an eccentric shape, the front one had a large balcony with a wrought iron staircase down to the ground to escape from a fire. As such, with both Mac and Bozer having more combat training than Riley, it was decided to place the 'quasi-familial' pair in the middle and the more balanced defensive team next to the accessible point.

"What's crawled up Jack's boots to tickle his toes this time?" asked an amused MacGyver as the duo of young men neared the others. This of course had Riley smirking even more as Jack took one look at his younger friend's face (and shiny short blond hair) and erupted in laughter again, holding his ribs as he leaned forward, so much his chest hurt from the effort.

Not getting any answers, the two men decided to stay with Jack in the corridor to wait for Kensi while Deeks showed their tech specialist the home-base setup. Marty led the hacker forward to the decorated half-circle main staircase, indicating the door to the in-law suite as they walked by, then down to the ground floor. He turned left as they exited the stairs, pointing to a thick wooden door that was directly next to the stairs, right in front of the mudroom and the connection door to the garage they had entered the house by.
"That's it." he explained as he took out a metallic card-key which he slotted in the complex mechanical lock above the handle. The device combined a punched-card with teeth on the sides for a reliable physical locking system and a numbered keypad to type in a code to disarm the electronic alarms.

"The place is shaped like like a cube of 20x20 feet, but it has that spot here, on the left, of about 5x10 feet for the stairwell. As you can see, there is a small iron wood stove as backup heat and light for power outages, the two big blue steel caissons on each side of the stove are gun vaults, that's an armored door to the outside, and this is our work space."

Riley couldn't help a gleeful smile at the sight. The tech setup was 15 feet wide by 10 feet deep, composed of a large wooden bench arranged in a 'U', with 2 levels of open wooden shelves underneath, and 6 tall steel & glass cabinets on top placed by pairs at each side. The systems were separated by logical group; all radios & telephones, all cameras and surveillance, Internex access servers with cable and satellite & household computing management. It was all very well set up, all military grade equipment & software, and the young female hacker was certain the policeman besides her couldn't understand, let alone use, a fraction of everything she saw.

As if reading her thoughts in her eyes, Deeks waved a hand vaguely, as he explained it away; "We had some help by our OPS people from HQ to build the system. Well, not exactly... They explained, we nodded, they built it, and now we try not to break anything when we turn on the lights to fetch our gear in the gun vaults. If it works, we don't touch it. Except for the radio & telephone console; that was made specifically on interdepartmental standards so Kensi and I could use it without causing a network-wide cascade failure... Or something similar... You know how hard it is to pay attention to technobabble when geeks go at it..." the policeman joked at her with a wide grin.

Davis gave Deeks a mock scowl as she unpacked her laptop, adapter cables, and analytics box, then sat down in one of the two plush wheeled wooden chairs to concentrate on the very sophisticated server stacks in front of her. These were not household systems, not by a long shot! Whoever had 'helped' them to assemble this wanted the couple to have military-level encrypted capacities coupled to an industrial strength telecom hub. Considering they were operating under the 'Noah's Ark' protocol, and that that particular piece of crapulence had taken over eight years to put in place the way it was at present, it didn't take Riley a whole lot of brain power to figure out these people had received some 'official' help so as to have a backup comms node & supply bunker to fall-back on in case the worse happened.

Like it so happened to have done just yesterday.

As she opened the curved glass panels to access the sockets and control keyboards, Deeks pulled out the other wheeled chair to sit besides her, watching silently as she worked her mojo on the high-caliber consoles. Five minutes of intense concentration were needed to decipher all the miniature icons on the electronics panels to identify correctly the sockets she was looking for, then she plugged her gear to obtain a secured anonimized vid-link with Matty's mobile workstation. She engaged the comms app on her laptop, entering the passwords needed to start the encryption routines and real-time analytics, then dialed into director Webber's personal VPN. It took almost a minute before an answering signal came back, the monitor turning from the Pheonix Foundation logo to an image of a person.

On the screen, agent Samantha Cage looked unkempt, her clothes rumpled from sleeping in them the last two days. The large dark bags under her eyes spoke volumes of her tiredness, and the weary closed-off set to her features told them that her days had not been any more pleasant than those of the teammates remaining in LA. The stains all over her shirt were clearly dried blood, and the discoloration of large bruising was visible at her throat. Riley was too new to the secret agent
business so she couldn't identify the cause of the injury, but Deeks had seen the results of manual strangulation many times in domestic situations during his LAPD years.

"How did anybody get close enough to put their hands around your throat? Are you alright? Is your situation secure? How fast can you exfil?" asked Marty roughly in quick sequence as he punched a small red button that was isolated in the middle of the work area's wooden top, surprising Riley by the sudden change in behavior and hard voice tone.

Agent Cage didn't even try for an actual smile, even though she was grateful for the man's kind interest in her welfare. "Listen carefully, there is little time before I have to close the laptop and change locations. The Lake Barcroft bunker was breached by almost 200 Trump fanatics around 01:00am last night. It was a mixed group of marines, rangers, corps of engineers and EOD. Because there were so few attackers, and they took such heavy losses just trying to breach the above-ground perimeter, there was never any ways for them to commit a complete functional takeover of such a large facility already housing so many armed people. However, they still tried to swarm through the breaches to kill as many of us as they could, but luckily, their bomb-holes were only big enough to allow single-file movement. We were able to shoot most right the moment they climbed down out of the cracks they sapped in the ceilings. Unfortunately, a few got wise and dumped demolition charges the size of car batteries into the breaches before coming down; that killed, injured, and stunned many of our defenders badly enough that some fanatics were able to come inside the bunker to shoot at us directly. Still, they had too many disadvantages to win anything durable. That's why we managed to fight them off long enough to break-off their attack altogether, allowing us enough time to patch up the survivors, regroup, and use the secret escape routes."

The woman on screen pushed her long blond hair out of her face tiredly as she spoke of the harrowing events. "We cleared out through specially installed extra-large concrete pipes under the lake and municipality to reach the evacuation hangars, then we boarded unmarked longhaul buses prepared for this scenario, to roll out of the extended DC metropolitan area. We spent almost 6 hours on the roads nonstop. We are presently in Charleston, West Virginia, at the Yeager Airport, near the Executive Terminal. Because we carry many injured and the weather is worsening, we had to stop in what looks like a public roadworks depot to set camp for the night. In reality, the edifice has massive underground parking lots and bunkers prepared and stocked for just this sort of thing. It was some of our NSA escapees who guided us here. Matty is only slightly injured, but she's sleeping off the sedatives from the surgeries she had to undergo to remove cement and rebar shrapnel that hit her when the ceilings were breached. We are heading due west back to LA per our best means, but the weather is execrable all over the east coast. A strong nor'easter is passing through for the next 48 hours, and they're forecasting a second one in the 3 to 5 days after that."

Riley swallowed passed the hard lump in her throat, trying to organize her thoughts to ask the right questions fast, before Cage hung up on them. "Sam," she asked hoarsely, "Is the mission up north still on? Do we still go to Vancouver for the techhead? What do we do about this mess? How does DXS react from now on?" the young woman spat out as fast as she could think the words. Obviously, at this point, speed and alacrity were of the essence.

A harsh 'ping' tonality rent the air in the shielded office, startling Riley badly into scowling at the speakers built into the wooden table around her, while Deeks put his hand under the lip of the workbench to push a green button that unlocked the internal door. Kensi came in followed by the DXS men to stand behind the two seated persons, letting the door close and lock again.

Seeing everybody assembled, Samantha took 15 seconds to repeat her warning and confirm that their northward mission was continuing regardless of circumstances.

"What the hells?" exclaimed Jack, incredulous at the turn of events. "We all saw with our own
peepers that the top dog lost the plot on national TV last night, right people? And they attacked and killed some of the good guys too!" Looking around the small room, the Delta-Forces specialist demanded "Why exactly is it in any ways logical to leave the country, and our colleagues, at a time like this? We need to stay here to help stabilize the mess!"

Agent Cage shook her head negatively; "No, Jack, it's not the best plan. Finding Lucas Wolenczak and questioning him officially for the record is the basic necessity here. As idiotic as it might sound to do this when the bullets are flying around our heads, we need his testimony to impeach Trump and destitute the entire White House staff legally. Only after that will we be able to take the moral high-ground and motivate the population into taking sides actively for more than just self-defense."

Angus ran both hands though his hair in frustration at the entire bordello around him. "Are you really saying to us that the law enforcement agencies can't take out this bastard and his religious mercenaries unless a stupid piece of paper is put on the news?" The green eyed male's entire face was congested by anger and disbelief. "How the heck does that work when all the different parts of the country are on fire already? Can't they just use an Apache helicopter to drop a few rockets on him and be done? Just how hard can it be to hard-stop a small bunch of defective religious nutcases all concentrated inside the limits of one single town?" the 27 year old griped nastily at his fellow agent.

MacGyver's choleric outburst was so out of character for him that his entire team looked at him as if he had grown an extra head all of a sudden. Kensi and Deeks, who didn't know them at all, stayed silent while waiting for the follow-up response from one of his own friends before they spoke their piece.

Eventually, it was actually Marty who answered when a minute of absolute silence had elapsed. "Okay, you need to take a breath buddy, and back away from the DXS method of 'hostile operations on foreign territory'; that won't work here." Deeks spoke with firm deliberate words at the younger man. "One, it's not foreign soil, it's the USA homeland, so the full set of rules applies, no excuses or bypasses. Secondly, the people around Trump may be sectarian nutcases but they are, unless proven otherwise, the legally and legitimately elected/nominated officials of the country, not hostile foreign agents. Thirdly, there's a crapton more than just 'a few fanatics limited to one town' for ANY president to get elected, let alone have practical control of the military and policing apparatus across the 50 states."

Turning his chair around to look at MacGyver in the eyes, Deeks continued to answer his question. "And fourthly, as a citizen, a lawyer and a cop, I agree with you; they are stupid papers. But, these papers aren't for us, inside what's left of the country when the dust settles. They're for everybody else, out there, in the other countries all around us, especially at the UEO Council and the World Bank. The genius kid's testimony will establish the legal basis needed to impeach Trump and his minions by proving beyond all doubts that they are depraved, delirious, sectarian crusaders who have made a clear, profit-centered, decision to bypass all laws, morality and customs. We need to show the other governments that all the religious fantasmagoria that the top dog surrounds himself with is just for show and tell. The real driving force is money, power, and setting himself above the capacity of any special prosecutor or tribunal to arrest, judge, and jail him for his multiple crimes."

"Detective Deeks is correct, Mac." agent Cage confirmed in soft tones. "We can break the crusade, defeat the white ecclesiastes, and even create a central registry of willing followers for later punishments or social exclusion, if we want to spend the efforts to make the list. But that won't convince the other countries that the arrests and trials were legal or fair. And it won't convince the UEO or the WB that the replacement government is actually legitimate, let alone legally authorized to use the public ressources and tax money for anything."
Deeks took over the explanation; "And that is the crux of the problem. Without international recognition for the legality of whatever is done to dethrone Trump's Papal Lordship, we could end up freeing the country only to realize our coffers are empty and the personal bank accounts of millions of citizens have been frozen for fear the new admin would seize/steal them to finance their revolt. And that would have one simple result: the USA would end up like like Ethiopia, Libya, Iraq or any of a bevvy of collapsed nations that turned into hellpits not even worth being called 'banana republics'."

Jack Dalton swore viciously, surprising his friends with his crass language. "Of course! It's conquest 101, just like the Romans showed the world how to do. A population will tolerate a regime change, even a tyranny, as long as the government makes their lives simpler by assuring the proximity services the right way. The Roman emperors were a bunch of incestuous, murderous, warmongering crazies, but when they conquered they used their army to cull criminals, clear and settle new farmland, paid local merchands for products in hard coins, build roads, bridges, baths, and so on... If the USA kicks out the madman's circus troop but has empty pockets... No roads, no police, no mail deliveries, no clinics, no schools, etc... Then the entire social tissue would quickly gangrene and deteriorate just like friggin Somalia. They're right, dammit! We got to get this kid's testimony to convince the bankers we're legit, otherwise, we might as well make ourselves comfortable right here for a very long period of revolutionary war."

With a face of disgust, Riley added aloud; "Let's not forget this kid's the darling pet supplier of cyber products for the World Bank. They're bloody well pissed at the fact he was basically run out of his own home and company by religious criminals. Because he has such a direct, personal, connection to WB governor Desdensky, he could actually save our economic stability all by himself. Or tank it in a pit, if he gets scared enough to react violently."

Mac made a face as he realized the truth of her words. "Blergh! I hadn't thought of that... This kid is gonna be a lot more central to this whole mess than any of us thought... Damn! If ever there was a time to talk with Matty about stuff..."

Agent Cage answered sympathically "No can do, Mac. She's asleep until we move the buses to our next camp stop, and we should be leaving at midnight, in less than an hour. We don't want to give the fanatics enough time to group together a genuine hunting party. Already getting hit by a few hundred bastards that fast and hard was a bad surprise, but these mongrels had four years to organize their coup d'état, and they were probably placing people in the armed services and police forces for decades before the 2016 elections. We escaped mostly by luck and tenacity; but in reality, the numbers don't favor anybody having any quick decisive victory in this fight. There are simply too many groups that are too small, and spread out too far from each other to really compensate by uniting into a movement. Matty told me before her surgery that she thought this would degenerate into a full-blown civil war for at least a year before any sort of resolution was in sight."

Jack exchanged looks with his team then told Samantha "If there's nothing else to report on either end, I suggest we cut this pity party and grab some food and shut-eye. We all have some traveling to do in a few hours."

The female agent nodded at him and shut her comms, leaving dead silence in her wake.

{ SQ } - { Hospitality for pilgrims } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 23:35pm)

(Western America; 20:35pm)

After Kensi called the New Orleans team office to confirm the travel schedule for the other two
agents, the entire group relocated to the large dining room in the center of the level, between the office and kitchen. All 6 persons went to join the three mothers who were conversing around a warm teapot, filling up a good portion of the 12 seat table. Marty walked to the outside wall to open the accordion doors to allow for the fresh night air to circulate through the house while they ate one last home cooked meal with their moms.

Jack, Mac and Riley looked around the room as they chose chairs at the massive wooden table, all on the same side as Diane, with their back to the set of glassed accordion doors leading to the right flank of the house. Roberta and Julia sat on the side in the middle of the floor-plan side by side. On the forward wall was located a glass fronted wood stove big enough to sit three kettles on top that served as heat and light during outages. It was bracketed by two heavy wooden buffets holding the tableware and necessities for receptions. There were four steel & glass cabinets spread around the room to display small decorative items, family pictures, and one was dedicated to NCIS team mementos. Against the thick rear wall that led to the kitchen was an impressive 10 foot wide wet bar & buffet that held back-lit liquor bottles, crystal glasses of all shapes, and a small Keurig K-cup brewer. The three DXS crewmen saw a narrow staircase with the upwards section completely open but a door closed the downwards to the basement. There was a wide door next to these stairs, but no identifier as to its purpose.

Bozer, impressive amateur cook that he was, sniffed loudly as he walked passed the table all the way, instinctively following the scent towards the thick masonry wall that separated the kitchen from the dining area. The stacked stone construction held an old fashion wood-burning cooking stove with central glass-fronted firebox, an enclosed baking oven on each side, an enlarged cooking surface and a hinged plate in the middle to uncover a grill directly over the flames. It also had a large metal water heating tank on the back with the copper pipe and spigot passing by the left side until it emerged in font of the stove for easier use. There were two levels of elevated warming trays built-in to the backsplash of the massive cast-iron structure, allowing to cook food long in advance then let it simmer slowly, whether in individual plates or communal pots. The pile of 3" wide x 12" long logs was situated at the right hand of the stove, in a shallow alcove built directly in the masonry column to keep it safe and dry.

Wilt inhaled noisily the savory smells emanating from the pots and compartments, obviously wanting whatever was offered quite eagerly. Someone had decided to light up the old vintage stove to slow-cook some prime turkey breasts in one oven and four berries & rhubarb pies in the other, while pots of mashed potatoes, steamed veggies and red wine reduction sauce were simmering on top.

After casing out the old stove and food, he gave a superficial look around the large kitchen, 20 x 30 feet of space wit 10 feet stainless steel butcher's island bolted to the floor in the middle of the space. Against the far wall away from the wood stove were two massive commercial stainless steel fridges followed leftwards by a sector with double sinks linked to a garbage grinder and mechanical trash compactor underneath. Following that was a massive commercial microwave oven on the counter top and the built-in dishwasher under. Then the ultra-modern hybrid range/oven using gas, incandescence and induction systems together for usual daily cooking. At Bozer's right were decorative french doors leading outside to an open patio some 10 x 20 feet. Wilt came back to the dining table, to sit besides his friends, commenting happily about the good hot food on its way to them.

Roberta shrugged carelessly, smiling as she pointed at Julia and herself; "It was the least we could do for Marty and Kensi after they welcomed us to live permanently in their home, to pass through this nightmare. Since we had already begun prepping when your call came in, making more portions was easy. The nicely banked wood fire did the rest, until everybody was de-stressed enough to eat without choking mid-meal. And it feels more homey, more peaceful, than the bloody electric range or, God forbid, the micro-wave oven."
Julia joked amusedly "For the first time in my life, I had less chance of burning down the house while cooking than ever before, despite it being a live-flame stove, because I wasn't alone during my efforts."

This led Marty to admit playfully "My beloved fiancée, unfortunately, can't cook or bake without damaging the appliances or rendering the food inedible, thus the idea to invite the maternal units to live with us. So we won't starve or live on call-in restaurant meals all the time. Strangely enough, the only thing Kensi can bake without catastrophe are the Pillsbury type pre-made dough thingies that you slice and lay on a baking sheet in the oven. Those she always does just fine, if you don't look too closely at the icing or fruit filling splashed all over during the preparation."

Moving out of his chair to avoid a bean on the shoulder from his pouting lover, the laughing man pulled Bozer and Mac with him to start spreading the invitingly warm food around the starving colleagues. They weren't friends yet, that would take time and effort, but they were already at ease with each other enough to no longer be on active look-out for betrayal or attack from the other team. As the 9 people set up for the long relaxing meal, the DXS team were told about the elevator next to the rear stairs, the large rear porch behind the garage that was screened-in, and the fact the porch was solid steel beams covered to serve as balcony for the in-law suite and main bedrooms above. Looking through the large rear windows as he took the communal platters of turkey and gravy, Bozer saw at the back of the lot a large in-ground swimming pool and cement pool cabin 15 x 15 feet wide.

Kensi activated the metal chandelier suspended high over the dining table, using the rotary dimmer to set it at 40%, giving their eyes a chance to rest a bit while making the atmosphere more relaxing. The dancing motion of the live flames in the iron stove made a gentle game of nuances and highlights in the illumination around the eating area that soothed nerves, allowing all the agents to unwind from the damnably day in the streets. Even though there was a ceiling mounted fold-down Internex monitor in the dining room, nobody even thought of activating it; everyone in the room was just fed up with bad news, warnings of impending social collapse and the repeated bombastic explosions of madness coming from DC at all hours.

Kensi explained between bites of turkey and sips of her chilled cola: "The promoter who built the initial housing development had planned to make big mansions for the Internet-Age nouveau riche of the 1990's so they had begun by creating quadruple lots to fit the immense footprint of the homes they had conceived. Then the electronics economy 'bubble' had collapsed, killing the demand for millionaire mansions, forcing the company to look for other clientele to survive. Their solution was to split the properties into the much more common double lots, then offer house designs aimed at large middle-class families. They had far more success; houses such as this one had sold off like pancakes right off the griddle. The models offered had been popular for their incredibly safe design of concrete & steel frame covered by faux-wood synthetic stone sidings for aesthetics, 6 large bedrooms & 5 full bathrooms, an in-law suite with separate entry atop the garage, and a fully finished basement throughout the entire house, even under the garage. The sub-level has two doors directly up to avoid passing through the house or garage, especially in case of escaping fire, or if you wanted to convert it to independent living space for your kids when they reached adulthood."

Marty continued "We got the property last year, when we officially got engaged. The owners who had bought it brand new, some 28 years ago, decided to downsize for a retirement condo closer to the ocean beaches. They moved to San Francisco, to be near their grand-kids. They sold us the house at a fairly low price, for the market of the time, and even left plenty of appliances and small items in the deal, as they would have only a 1/6 of this house to live in at their new place. We're incredibly happy with our purchase, even if the damned hour-long commute morning & evening is long and annoying, especially in LA traffic which never stops for anything."
It was nearing 22:00pm when the meal wound down enough for the persons to clear up the table, pass around a few digestive liquors, and start talking about the travel plans for the flight up north. In travel time, it wouldn't be all that long, at about 5 hours in the air, but the possible delays on departure, and then again with possible hiccups at arrival in a foreign country, could turn an easy hop-over into a logistics and legal nightmare. Riley insisted they turn on the local LA news, to see the current state of the town, while she booted her laptop on the dining table besides them to get their emails and scan online chatter for their estimated ground route to the airport.

The young hacker had been right to insist on watching the news. The extended Los Angeles metropolitan area was quickly turning into a dangerous quagmire of low-level criminality let loose, and everyday citizens with petty grudges exploited shamelessly the civil unrest to settle scores or worsen domestic violence situations. All these deplorable elements of society were betting on the reality that the LAPD, being already stretched to the max by all the usual daily crap and its own internal problems that never really got solved, wouldn't interfere in most of what got called-in, let alone investigate after the cadavers had cooled. The city was fast becoming a haven for the dregs of south California to congregate in, like a corpse being assaulted by maggots. The news programs reported that rich families who owned secondary houses anywhere away from LA had begun leaving the area in droves. This left thousands of homes empty and un-watched for squatters to invade and occupy without fear of retaliation by the owners or the cops. This willful blindness from the squatters would eventually lead to even worse rioting whenever happened the inevitable reaction of the legal owners to have the cops or private security push out these unlawful home wreckers out of their dwellings to live in them again.

Marty Deeks winced as he saw images of a partially finished apartment building that had just completed dry-closing the structure, but not set any infrastructures or services inside yet, become occupied forcibly by destitute homeless people. These poor decrepit souls were all smiles, letting out shouts of happiness or laughing aloud that they could at long last sleep indoors, out of the cold, away from animals and violent cops looking to beat hobos just for shits and giggles. The building didn't have any running water, toilets or even sewage lines in place. You could live without electricity well enough if you had wood to burn safely, but metro LA without active plumbing wouldn't be livable for long. These people would soon be emptying chamber pots out of the windows and using the garden hoses of the neighboring buildings to run water lines into their own unfinished shanty structure. Marty didn't want to make any bets on how long it would last before it burned down, or got taken over by a violent gang as a base for prostitution, selling drugs, and gun-running. They had two weeks, tops, before the nearest crew got ambitious, or desperate, depending on overall events in the borough.

Jack Dalton sipped his quarter-ounce brandy with slow deliberation as he watched the news broadcasts. He would be the lead driver and needed to be as sober as possible, in case they decided on traveling by night. When he saw the video of a pair of fire trucks getting shot at while they tried to position to help extinguish a burning house in a poor sector plagued by gang violence, he realized they were already losing the fight against the clock. No matter what hour they left at, night or morning, the streets would again be filled with various debris, broken cars, pieces of exploded houses, and more dead bodies while those from the day before wouldn't have been moved. Nothing was going to make this departure any better anymore.

Wilt Bozer glared angrily at the monitor, as he saw again and again the scenes that had plagued
American history for the last 200 years repeat as if the World Wars and Modernity had never come to the country. Ever since the 1800’s, there had always been a strong silent undercurrent of racism and religious delirium operating underground, well away from news cameras and public scrutiny. These had given birth to the infamous Ku-Klux-Klan but rapidly followed with a plethora of christian sects based solely on racial separation and white-power domination. In the early 1900's a slew of germanic organizations started to rise from obscurity to take a spot in the sunlight; the German Bundt, the American Nazi Party, the Silver Shirts, the Aryan Brotherhood, and hundreds more since. From the 1990's on were added several more sects with viking or Odinite cult themes that saw themselves as race-brothers to the nazi sects, wanting white-power as well. And now, in the year 2020, they saw the culmination of that simmering kettle explode in the open; religious madness ran rampant in the higher social strata while the poor warred against each other in the streets like rabid animals. There was no way this was going to end fast or well; all the lessons of history showed it.

Angus MacGyver turned towards Kensi Blye, purposefully ignoring another news segment about gang violence that degenerated when the people in the affected neighborhood started shooting at the gangsters from the windows of their homes, hoping to cull the problem once and for all. It wouldn't work. The gangs would come back with more thugs and set fire to the houses indiscriminately to punish them for daring to resist the 'bosses' of the groups. Mac had seen the same thing happen again, and again, and again, in poor countries where the cops only patrolled the rich areas or the business districts to keep the beggars and hobos away. Since the LAPD was now clearly out of its wits, and out of resources to react with, every gang, sect, cult, and militia in town or the nearby country-side would move in to claim territory, buildings, and resources while the authorities were too busy with their own survival to care for others anymore.

Getting the female marine's attention, Mac asked "Were you planning on reaching the airfield tonight or in the morning? Cuz at this rate, I don't think it will make much of a difference anymore. We might reach the airport to find the plane safe and ready, but no traffic controllers present to manage the flight operations. If that's the case, we'll have to plan an overland trip that doesn't rely on commercial transports or infrastructures to reach Vancouver."

Kensi was miffed at the situation too. "Damn," she swore softly, "Going by car takes at least two days if the weather cooperates, but it's the depth of winter season so it won't, and the roads won't all be cleared properly all the way. We could be looking at three days of road. IF we have a big enough RV that's livable with bunks and full facilities aboard, and we switch drivers en-route to avoid stopping. There's no way to know anymore if the trains or Greyhound buses will be rolling in these lawless conditions. A lot of drivers will refuse to leave their families alone and defenseless, let alone their town, for fear that their vehicles will get hijacked in some isolated spot, far away from help."

Marty spoke in neutral tones "The sea route could be an option if we get desperate enough, but it wouldn't be easy. With an average speed of 30mph in clear weather, that 1,200 mile journey should normally take only two days, but could presently take a full week to accomplish because of the way the winter winds are sweeping hard from the Pacific into British Columbia, Washington State and Oregon again. Besides the weather, any boat large enough to hold safely 10-12 people on choppy seas would need to be over 150 feet long and fully furnished with multiple bunk cabins. Motorized cabin cruisers like that aren't common to begin with since its luxury for the rich. Now, it would be near impossible to find one in port since anybody with a yacht that big and costly would take it out at sea, to keep it safe or take their family away from the civil unrest exploding around us."

The female marine put the last nail in the coffin of their travel plans. "Let's not forget; we still have our two agents from New Orleans coming in to serve as extra legal and scientific muscle. We can't really leave without them, especially since they confirmed they had managed to hitch a ride on a military C-130 emergency flight from NOLA to LA that was bringing troops in to help re-establish social peace in town."
Julia spoke up in fearful tones "Yeah... Today the radio shows were saying it seemed like the national guards are too few to make a real difference around LA by themselves. That forced the army to grab troops from places that have less problems, for now, to bus them here to quell the mess. Somehow, I really don't think it will do that much good. Not in the long run."

Roberta snorted sarcastically "When the junkies are carjacking ambulances right out of hospital parking lots to steal the Oxycontin and morphine in the surgery kits, even with an LAPD squad car or rent-a-cops parked next to it, you know it will take more than boys with green clothes and guns to repair what's broken. Our country needs a new soul, not more shooting matches between dopeys and brutes."

Making at face at the thought of all that was going bad this night, Kensi decided to focus on what they could, and should, affect by themselves. "Riley? Do you think you could contact the airport to ask about your plane? We need to know if it's still viable and the airport still functions, otherwise we won't be going anywhere tonight."

Nodding positively, the young hacker affirmed "If you lend me your tech hub for a half-hour, I should be able to reach them to get confirmation on their status pretty quickly. I could also try to scan the airfield's control tower to see what the crews are doing about maintaining services. You're right, we need to decide fast how we move out, before we're out of options or under enemy fire."

{ SQ } - { Travel plans, redux } - { SQ }

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 01:24am)

(Western America; 22:24pm)

Piled up in the office again, the 6 members of the mission group were waiting on Riley to establish contact with the DXS plane. The line rang a few times before the principal pilot answered. As soon as the vid-phone turned from the Phoenix logo to the face of a human being, they knew they had a problem to deal with.

"Agent Davis, this is agent Sampson. I'm glad you called ahead of time cuz I didn't know how to reach you. The twits at HQ forgot to give me your current call signs and VPN key so we had to sit on our hands until you called. I can see six people in the room, is that all of you?"

"No," Riley answered, "We have two more coming by USAF transit from New Orleans, necessary for the mission. In fact, they are already on a C-130 heading straight for your airfield, we were planning to reach you at about the same time, later in the wee hours."

The pilot grunted, unamused. "Well, the fly-boys had better have some good instruments on their bird cuz the tower's been taken over by the national guard and they've turned around plenty of legitimate inbound flights without justifying themselves to date, even when some of them had filed flight plans weeks ago. If you plan to come over, you might want to stop over at the control complex to straighten things out before the USAF transport gets here."

Jack snorted in dark humor, saying "Well, it looks like that little nap we wanted just got pushed back to tomorrow morning after all."

Deeks told the pilot on screen "We're gearing up and leaving inside 15 minutes. It will still take us between one and two hours to reach you, the way the streets are. Over."

The line was closed then Riley started hacking her way through the airfield systems to look inside the control tower to find what was going on. Minutes later, she had the internal security cameras relaying
images that explained everything. The two air traffic controllers were lying on the floor in pools of blood while a cheap tabletop computer & tripod antenna had been jacked into the servers to give somebody remote access to the programs so they could effectuate the air traffic management from elsewhere without being exposed or identified. A quick sift through the flight plans registry showed clearly that the flights were all turned away without any discrimination or logic, other than to interdict access to this particular airfield.

Wilt rubbed a weary hand down his face, commenting sarcastically "Well, that job's done easily. Go in, unplug, leave. It'll be faster than waiting in line at McDonald's in rush hour for my Big Mac – fries – latte trio."

"Yeah, man," griped Angus as he crossed his arms to keep from fidgeting nervously. "It's not like hiring replacement air traffic controllers is our job, is it?"

Riley made an understanding noise from her seat, typing away on her laptop without paying real attention to the emoting going on around her. "And there!" she said, closing off her program with a flourish of the hand. "The local national guard are now aware of the problems inside the tower at John Wayne Airport, and I linked them into the security camera feeds to prove the situation to them. The dispatcher at their answering center is now on line with his colonel about it as we speak. They'll handle this hack-job and rectify the mess, but I do suggest we get there pronto, just in case they drag their feet too much. We may have to put MacGyver on the horn to guide the C-130 down to the tarmac safely if the guards aren't present to do it."

"Whaaat?" whined Angus, much to amusement of the others. "Why the hell would I be the air traffic boss all of a sudden? I've never done that before! I don't even have a piloting license! How do you think I could direct airplane traffic anywhere?" he asked grumpily, put-off by the laughter of his teammates.

"Well, baby Einstein" answered Riley while using Matty's nickname for him to everybody's amusement, "We only have one genius on hand, so 'tag!' you're it!" she told him with a shit-eating grin on her face as she laughed along with the others.

Crossing his arms over his chest as he scuffed his boot on the tiled floor in frustration, the young man griped "Why does that sound like what my recruiter for the EOD training course said, back when I was joining the army?"

Nobody answered him; they were too busy laughing.

More gifts for Christmas

(Funeral March – Frederic Chopin)

Eastern America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 22:13pm

Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 19:13pm

Daleminton Hotel; suite #204

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Walking purposefully on legs that were pain-free for the first time in almost three weeks, Lucas processed the opening of the work room's doors then brought in all that he would need for the evening of arduous labor to come. He collected his portable workstation and several paper copy files from the bedroom where they were locked in one of the large drawers under the bed that were normally reserved for sheets, pillows and other bed wares. After setting those items down on the
counter near the inert fireplace, he brought in the tea warmer, kettle and goblet to help stay warm in
the cold room, which reminded him to go collect a fleece vest in his closet for the same purpose, after
he had verified the contents of the mini fridge in case he craved a snack during his work.

Once everything he thought he could need was inside the office, the teenager closed and locked the
doors to avoid being bothered by anybody during the activation of the two last modules of his remote
management hub. The technology was too proprietary to be compatible with other systems easily,
but it was also too powerful to be left out in the open where an idiot could try to use it without any
understanding of the devices and energies at stake.

Looking at the setup of the room, Lucas saw module #1 admin & sys-op at the left hand’s far back
near the counter and inert fireplace, with module #2 Echo-Cloaking Broadcaster in the left hand’s
forward sector near the doors.

On the right hand, the full-wall built-in closet had been completely opened up with all doors and
shelves removed as he asked. Inside the ex-closet's space were parked the two materials crates;
square armored boxes with a wheel base equal to a standard pallet, but six feet tall, containing stores
of basal elements and molecules in liquid, powder and gaseous forms. Each of the materials
containers were armored and hermetically sealed under vacuum, with a locking valve that responded
only to the equipments in module #3 so that his valuable, sometimes rare to the point of being
militarily classified, building blocks wouldn't get stolen or contaminated.

Placed in the right-hand's far back was module #3 design & auto-crafting. The D&AC caisson was
built with a similar rectangular wheelbase to #1 and #2 but topped 6 feet in height to house the multi-
dimensional printer, press, welder and acid bath/etcher plus many more equipments. Each machine-
tool was both proprietary and secret, ultra-compact custom built versions designed and assembled by
Lucas himself so that he could have mobile production capacity if he had to visit a client's locale.
Now, it would help to create his capacity for defense and survival.

In the right hand's forward sector was module #4 Neuroplexic Thought-Web Weaver. The NTWW
shared the same type of mobile box as module #3. It was a complex set of main-boards, power
regulators, crystal wire antennae and crystal pipes that worked like a Tesla coil, in that it spread an
electromagnetic wave in concentric spherical patterns around itself or through physical electric &
network cables and water pipes connected to it. This wave was attuned to the neural frequencies
specifically so that it connected to the small synthetic crystal implants in Lucas' head and body to
interlink him with his devices without solid wires or physical contact.

Now, the teenager walked into the closet, to the two materials vaults. The cargo chests were
promptly connected to preexisting electricity sockets in the closet's back wall, then electricity and
network ports in the admin & sys-op module to interlink with the Cyberghast Hub's anti-theft and
remote surveillance protocols.

After that, the D&AC was opened, hydraulically jacked to level, gyro-stabilized, and connected
electrically and cybernetically to the admin console to receive directly the construction blueprints and
programming instructions that would result in the physical manifestation of Lucas' intensely creative
mind.

Then the NTWW was opened, hydraulically jacked to level, and connected to the ECB by 110 and
220 volts electricity, RJ45 and fiber optics cables, telephone wires and a pair of special dedicated
transparent hoses that would circulate fluid between the two wheeled contraptions. This custom
made fluid was one of Lucas' creations; a biochemical compound that contained live human neuron
cells suspended in electromagnetic catalyst solution based on synthetic blood. The liquid served to
augment and exponentialize the interlink between the Neural Interface, the ECB, and through the
NTWW, the rest of the ‘phantom’ neuroplexic network that precious few people knew about to date.

Once all the cables, wires and pipes were in place, Lucas slotted his portable workstation and cellphone in their docking ports, activated them, then triggered the secured ciphered boot-up routine to let the new modules activate automatically, which would take about ten more minutes until everything was fully ready to serve. Sitting in his plush director's chair, he turned on the warming and massaging systems then fixed himself a goblet of spiced tea. Taking a sip of warm liquid courage, he hummed an old Russian-Jew folk song in Yiddish as he waited.

{ SQ } - { Push-button warfare; redux } - { SQ }

(Eastern America; 22:46pm)

(Western America; 19:46pm)

Once the Cyberghast Hub was fully awakened, the teenager's proprietary communications management suite appeared on the left screen, running down the list of what he had received during the night, morning and afternoon, then processed the synchronization routines of all his personal devices so he had multiple backups of critical data or paperwork. There was some paperwork from the Vancouver Police Department, the RCMP and even a letter from CSIS requesting a formal meeting at their building in Vancouver's downtown. The boy set all this correspondence for later, after all the important survival and warfare adjustments had been done. Besides, immigration, customs & taxes, and police formularies could be ignored if the countries concerned were burning to ash, or soon to be.

Lucas activated on the main screen the application he had custom built to manage the status of his ever-growing phantom botnet. He was up to 2,207,693 attack bots; 3,739 overwatch nodes; 1,907 remote management bots; 721 data-vault bots; 286 dead-drop reception bots and 372 query processing bots. He had now co-opted to his service 627 phantom Internex nodes that could broadcast messages under false identities or emulate public services to manipulate the responses of police, firefighters, ambulances and others in any given zone of North America. He had yet to touch the other continents as they were still planned for the following weeks. He did update his orders for all dormant bots located in machines inside the borders of the UEO Treaty's territories, military bases and dependent ships to fully activate, then start co-opting machines and networks, instead of being stalled as he had done for several months now.

With basic housekeeping chores out of the way, the teenager concentrated on his two main companies that allowed him to walk around high society openly with his head held high. Roughly an hour of administrative duties was sufficient to move assets, then order all the workers to bring their families into the protective shelters built inside the Wise Apothecary or Wolenbahn workshops specifically for long-term situations of this sort. Lucas' ancestors had begun the tradition since their very roots in war torn Europe of the 1400's to build bunkers, or at least emergency dormitories, in their factories because the countries were so often at war with neighbors, experienced riots and unrest, or faced the draconian whims of Nature with harsh winters, torrential rains and floods. Since many of the workers were somehow related to the company owners, it had made sense, in a spirit of community, to set aside some space in the cellars or attics to prepare sheltered lodgings for refugees. The tradition had been maintained for over 600 years, and even Franklin Henry Wise had included them in the designs of his many manorial estates or industrial expansions. The adolescent issued to all WAC and WEI employees the signal for emergency recovery, ordering his private corporate security guards to step up to full combat status, in both USA and Canada, until told otherwise.

I crave your pain

(SeaQuest – season 1 theme)
Lawrence Wolenczak was roughly manhandled out of his small cramped cell and into the large interrogation room while Cynthia watched on impassively from behind the thick bars of her own confinement. Sitting silently on the cot with her hands folded on her lap, she only moved her eyes to follow the two burly sailors garbed in body armor that had rudely extracted the unathletic and not the least bit combat-enabled engineer, try to resist being frog-marched relentlessly to his doom.

Two minutes and several muffled shouts of protest later, the two soldiers came out without their unwilling tag-along. They tramped down the corridor between the two rows of tight barely-lit cells, never paying her any attention on their way out of the detention area. It was almost 15 minutes later that the entry airlock was opened and a tall rotund mass of angry flab trod noisily down the passage.

Walking in a slightly hunched way, almost like a gorilla, that made his beige button shirt stretch and strain against his barrel torso, showing that there was as much muscle as fat on his heavy frame, the scant light reflecting off his bald pate, admiral William Allard Boyd Noyce had come bearing violence and misery to all peoples he would encounter. His long feet clad in heavy armored boots pounded the metal deck grates as he advanced, unerringly aiming his Wrath towards the room at the end of the corridor, passing by the only occupied cell without so much as a side glance at the occupant.

Noyce slammed the interrogation door open with a thick fist and barely two seconds later, a loud meaty ‘twack’ sound was heard, followed by a bellow of disbelieving pain and pleading for mercy from a desperate Lawrence who now understood just how deep a cesspit he was drowning in. Two more such whacks sounded off before other people passed by.

Now coming slowly down the corridor were captain Bridger in his dark blue jumpsuit uniform and an unidentified young black male of nondescript features, dressed in an odd all-black uniform that Cynthia had never seen. The young soldier carried two medium sized briefcases with an air of detachment that made her gut twist in knots as yet another meaty smack sounded out of the open room as her ex-husband shouted anew pleas for a mercy that they all knew would never be granted in this life.

The door to the interrogation room closed as Lawrence saw the uniform of the third man. He must have known what part of the UEO he was from, as his howl of despair reverberated around the entire detention block for several seconds after the airtight valve had shut and locked. The middle-aged woman didn’t know what foul creatures her ex had been consorting with in the last two decades, but it was now obvious that they had come calling for their payment.

And the currency they traded in were sweat, blood and tears. Nothing else would do.

Lucas wages shadow-war

(Funeral March – Frederic Chopin)
The young male stood from his chair and walked around the office, enjoying this rare period of painless mobility as he inspected the insides of the separate modules of his precious instrument. After concluding that everything was purring along as expected, the young man recovered and rewired his smartphone to his person then left the office, being careful to lock and test the doors. With the full neural interface glasses on his head, he could easily work the virtual world and guide his hands at the same time as he had practiced this for two years already.

He walked to the kitchen, to the still present service cart, and created himself a small plate of solid food because he had eaten only once during the entire day and the meal he did eat about two hours ago seemed far away. As he was cybernetically verifying his monetary assets and moving them to banks outside the USA and NAC altogether, he took up a ladle of meat raviolis with some of the nice warm meat sauce, some fried bacon strips, a pan seared fillet of sole, some mashed potatoes and hot grilled veggies. This would simply keep him from having a bad migraine headache resulting from lack of nourishment during the day; the bevvy of pills he had taken DID NOT in any way shape or form feed a growing boy properly. He didn't need his three medical doctorates to tell him that!

"Alexa! Close all the lights in the suite." he ordered the domotics system.

Sitting at the table in his favorite position, with the blazing hearth at his back as his sole source of light, he took the meta-glasses off his face and closed his eyes to rest them as he ate through his meal. With the Neuroplexic Thought-Web Weaver active at long last, he could be connected to his private neural web without external devices to boost the signal up to a distance of 10 kilometers (6 miles). This allowed him to bypass his laptop and smartphone for all the work he needed done tonight, freeing his hands, eyes, and entire body in fact, to assemble and test a few little gimmicks that the Design & Auto-Crafting module was hard at work producing for him. Things that would not have passed the borderlines under any circumstances if already assembled and usable.

Putting that out of his mind until after he ate, Lucas concentrated on finding and cyber-raping remorselessly the back-door emergency codes that were built into the servers of America's Internal Revenue Services (IRS) who were in charge of tax collection so that Homeland Security (DHS) and the National Security Agency (NSA) could see and track the flows of money in & out of the country. The goal was to see which foreign agents were paying american businesses or officials for state secrets and access to critical restricted technologies under the table. A less well known provision was that it could be used by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) to verify if people tried to import/export tech that was on the federal 'do not sell' list which stated which countries could buy what in the USA by checking on their yearly taxes during an investigation.

In fact, along with Social Security, DMV and Gun Permit Registry, the IRS was in the top bracket of most hacked federal systems each year, unlike NASA or the CIA. The reason was simple; there were two handfuls of countries with hackers good enough to hack into and recover data from those places without being traced back to their point of origin. By comparison, there were several tens of thousands of people each year who wanted to know if a spouse was hiding revenue or assets in case of divorce, or wanted to make sure they got their fare share during an inheritance dispute, or wanted to make certain their business partner wasn't laundering money overseas or doing bad stuff with the joined company accounts, etc... In the ordinary life of ordinary people far removed from spying and diplomats, paying a mid-level hacker to snoop around the IRS was less expensive than filing in court for a legal search warrant, and it couldn't backfire in your face if the person investigated was in fact innocent. This systematic repetitive hacking and splicing created unstable, but findable, holes in the firewalls and cyclic scans which, coupled to the permanent back-doors, made for a bloody Swiss
cheese that held little integrity anymore.

This structural weakness allowed Lucas to probe, scan, sweep and find quickly weak spots in the defensive array, penetrate and set into the user control matrix the access codes he had stolen from the CIA's moribund old back-up server. This in turn allowed him to search and triage all the data stored directly inside the IRS master file servers in Washington DC and download only the results that he needed to proceed to the next phase of action. The adolescent set the data report queries he wanted to employ in his cybernetic war then retracted his contact to target instead the administrative & management apps used by the IRS high brass. Once he found the menus, he entered the special CIA access codes to engage the small invisible app that created a 'CIA ghost' user with permanent codes that would allow him to come back by the main front door of the server without worrying about being discovered or back-traced.

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 24:22am - midnight)

(Western America; 21:22pm)

As he worked on the IRS data and access, Lucas ate slowly and pondered on the subject of money, investments, companies and the political influence derived from such. Being a young child or adolescent in a society that was both gerontocratic and plutocratic at its core was not easy, even before Trump came to power. Being a young boy with an overflowing imagination, a get-go attitude and the autonomy to do things without being hand-held all day long was never going to be acceptable by the adults around, no matter how modern and liberal they claimed to be; not when so much money was at stake in the situation. Most of the adults he had seen in his life to date would have gladly taken his money and locked it away from him, leaving him a bare pittance of an allowance, which they would tell him how to spend to boot.

It had never been the money that kept him from running away from his family's nefarious grasp.

Lucas could have easily slipped away from his parents years ago, many opportunities having presented themselves at key points of life. Besides, by age 7 he was basically fully autonomous in his capacity to tend his body, feed himself, and wash his person and his clothes. Yes, that meant using a microwave oven or a washing machine, but as long as the machines were at hand, he could do it. His meals would have been unimaginative for sure, at first at least, but it would have gotten better with time. In fact, by age 11 he could have disappeared off the maps to live all alone by using only the money he garnered through Dark Web activities and the routine programming contracts from private companies, but he was capable of more, and he wanted to be better than just some invisible parasite, sucking on society's underbelly. Plus, the Wise Heritage of his ancestors he had found about at age 9 made him realize that he really was due for a much greater, more public profile than that of a nationless, homeless, petty criminal who was perpetually on the run from every bank and government in existence. Such people never lived well or very long. And Lucas had wanted a long happy life, in the far past, long ago, when he was still young and full of dreams.

Dreams that were replaced by fear, violence and WRATH.

The religiously empowered, racist, misogynist, ageist, plutocratic defective retards in Washington DC had no idea of what kind of savage monster they had just caused to awaken. For years now, Lucas had been fighting with the amorphous cloud of coldly contemptuous Darkness that dwelt inside his damaged, sickened soul, oozing from the cracks in his mind like puss out of gangrenous injuries. The depressive, forlorn adolescent had almost managed to control it for good a couple of months ago, but then the news of his dear father's latest bastardy was unveiled unto him. Then the passed week of travels, changes, fleeing for his life, stress, anxieties, uncertainties, open threats, violence and seeing with his own eyes the mercenaries that Lawrence had tried to pay to beat, rape,
maim and kill him...

And now, today, the American government finally showed to the entire multiverse exactly what it had been preparing for the last 4 years.

You don't rebuild the Oval Office in a few hours, and you can't make high quality artisanal furniture like the throne, desk, couches and firepot overnight. Even the clothing sets and metal jewelry needed several weeks to be properly crafted and fitted to their wearers. No, Trump had been preparing this little show for a long time already; he was probably just forced into revealing it faster than had been planned. His writing out those two presidential decrees had the feel of amateur impulsive tail-wagging doggishness that had suffused his entire term in office, and most of his life to date as well. There was probably a plan to unveil everything AFTER the inauguration in January 2021, once he was legally (technically) unmovable from the office.

But, as usual with charismatic preachers and populist tyrants, Trump must have wanted to do the typical surprise "Gotcha!" moment specifically to stun not only the infidel heathens, but his own troops too, to remind them HE was in charge, nobody else. Plus, there was certainly the ubiquitous victory cry of "In ya'll's faces, bitches!" that so pervaded all sports competitions and the corporate environment in America for the last two decades, that the man would never have passed on it for anything in the world. Winning was good, but never if you couldn't see the shame and angst of defeat on the faces of the people you had just beaten at the game.

And so here they were, with the new Apostle of primitivism, the Papal Lord Amerikus having declared war on Jews, children, and doctors of all sorts, especially those in the mental health professions, as if he were casting the widest net possible to make certain his goons caught Lucas at some point or other, from one reason or another. Even if one were to think the teen was paranoid, it wasn't a situation that left the boy with many ways to believe that the entire thing wasn't orchestrated specifically just to steal his companies and fortune, strip his licenses, deny his diplomas, and justify imprisoning or killing him without a trial... After all, the geriatric bastard hadn't given the unrestricted right to kill anybody you liked, did he?

Oh, yeah, he did! He said specifically that "Any act made with the intent to keep slave-stock, women and children submissive to adult white men, including beatings, rape, mutilation and murder was LEGAL and not to be interfered with by police or the courts."

Yeah, that wasn't a blank check to come after his pasty white hide, wasn't it...

No, Lucas wasn't controlling the Darkness in his soul anymore; the Tenebrous Cloud was loose, oozing its oily way all around his poor, shattered mind, tainting the warped pieces as it passed them, corroding them to decayed ash when it actually touched... Yes, Lucas was aware he was now fully unbalanced and in dire need of solitude and support, preferably as in-patient lodged in a psychiatric facility, to help stabilize and rectify his mental situation before he harmed others on a titanesque scale. It was just too bad nobody wanted to leave him alone long enough to spend a few years in a Swiss sanatorium, with only the glacier-clad Alps as neighbors. The hordes of mentally and socially 'limited' imbeciles who aggrieved him would regret this lack of common sense and judgment errors...

Soon...

Like, right away, soon.

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 01:17am)

(Western America; 22:17pm)
Having finished his plate of hot food and washing it down with a nice goblet of spiced tea, the teen eyed the buffet cart and decided to try to stand on his legs, to see if they still worked well. They did, in fact, still work without cramps or shakes so the boy brought his soiled tableware to the kitchen to set it in the plastic rack so that room service could change them for clean ones in the morning. If there had been a dishwasher, he would have taken care of it himself. He wasn't lazy or incapable, but the hotel claimed 5-star service and that meant that guests did as little housekeeping themselves as possible while respecting their privacy in the suite.

After dumping his wastes and rinsing the tableware in the sink so that the garbage disposal unit could flush it all away, Lucas pulled out of the cupboards several sets of reusable plastic containers to do the same thing as he had with the brunch cart Friday evening. Before going to sleep yesterday, he had stored away in his kitchen freezer and fridge as well as the two mini fridges in the bedrooms several of the food items so they wouldn't be wasted and thrown out as garbage when they were in fact still quite good. Items like bread, bagels and muffins would simply be put back in the hotel pantries for the restaurants or room service to distribute as they were still fresh and untouched, but the cooked items like meats, eggs, crepes, waffles and potatoes would be considered 'waste' when it wasn't the case for real. Well, the restaurant & hotel sanitation laws said they couldn't be kept, but nothing said Lucas himself couldn't hoard them for when he craved an urgent midnight snack or needed to fill his stomach to avoid acid reflux due to his pills or stress.

So, the young man whistled softly an old Irish Celt song from before the British Dominion of the Emerald Isle as he slowly placed the hamburger patties, London steak and beef cube skewers in the same container. Then the sole was in its own, the chicken in another, the raviolis and all the meat sauce in a fourth. It took three large tall containers with special screw-on tops to empty out each pot of soup as there was no way the adolescent would let waste such good, easy to digest food. If anything in the world came out of the microwave oven as good as it did from the regular stove top, it was soup and it was also the prime choice for a snack on chilly evenings sitting in front of a movie or computer game. The grilled vegetables were packed away but all the salad greens and cold pickled veggies were left in the cart as those were all separate and would simply be put back in the restaurant kitchen to be used in the coming day. Pickled stuff in particular was usually just put back in the large pail it was taken from and set in the fridge again until it was needed so the teen had no fear of waste for that item. A few smaller plastic containers with screw-top were employed to keep a bit of of the excellent rich brown mushroom and peppercorn gravy that was supposed to accompany the meat servings. Unlike mustard, relish, ketchup and other generic condiments that were in retail brand bottles, and therefore perfectly safe for reuse, the gravy was made to order in the hotel restaurant and much higher quality too.

Having carefully packed everything and written on the small whiteboard rectangle inset in the lid of each container the item and date it was preserved, Lucas turned his attention to the desserts. The ice cream would go back as it was safely in the same sort of plastic retail gallon tuns that were used in the buffet so it wouldn't be wasted. The orange curd pie was far too tempting to let go, as it was both comfort food by excellence and coffee ‘à côté’ by definition. Since the pie came in a solid steel baking mold with a clear plastic cover fitted over, placing the thing in the freezer was as easy as choosing which of the three fridges would hold it. He might have hoarded a bit much and was running out of cold storage space. Thankfully, the large yule log was set on a thick rectangular glass serving plate and was covered by a glass cloche to keep it protected from the air. Set up this way, the masterfully decorated cake could sit on the kitchen counter or even the dining table for several days and still be perfectly edible at each piece he took.

Lucas felt that his enjoyment of his simple peaceful vacations had been hampered enough as it was, he wouldn't let anybody or anything keep him from enjoying at least the fine exquisite food that the hotel complex had promised him when he reserved. And given how much he paid them, he was bloody well gonna enjoy stuffing his face like a regular carefree teenaged boy on winter holidays,
even if it made him sick to his stomach to eat so much. Holiday excesses were supposed to be normal too, and he wanted normality in his damned life, for once in a decade! It wasn't so much to ask for, was it?

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 01:59am)

(Western America; 22:59pm)

Having finished his most pressing chores, the refugee decided to get sit in the living room to enjoy the massive sectional couch as he watched the late evening news. "Alexa! Activate living room TV, set on Vancouver's CBC channel." he told the domotics system as he walked carefully across the length of the suite, firmly gripping his cane in his right hand regardless of the fact his legs seemed to be cooperating for the moment. Bitter experience had taught him that such periods of painlessness did not last long.

Once sitting with his legs spread out in front of him, he allowed himself to relax into the deep plush cushions as the commercials ended and the news program began. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reporters certainly had a take on events in the USA that was – very – different from what the reporters back in DC would be saying. Their analysis of the situation and the actors involved, including Lucas himself much to his dumbfounded surprise, were more aligned with the European position than with the American declarations.

The one thing that Lucas had not seen coming though, was that the executive cabinet of the North-American Confederacy had just declared publicly that the military alliance of the three great countries of Canada, USA and Mexico had been utterly terminated by joined accord of Mexico and Canada. The reaction to that from Washington had been quite negative. Apparently, the US government had tried to threaten the two other countries into submitting to America's 'Christian Authority' and both had answered that such threats were tantamount to an act of war, thus promptly disbanding the NAC treaty and begun to rebuild their border defenses along the USA-facing lines. To say that Trump was angry would be to misunderstand the 'idiot'. The dumb blond mop had gone on TV to say that his campaign promise was being done exactly as he had promised; "There was a Great Big Beautiful Wall being built along the southern border and Mexico was paying for it's construction".

Did he really believe his own spiel at this point, or was he still lying his face off to his voting base? It was an interesting conundrum to examine, especially since, from a certain skewed perspective, he was actually right about the bloody wall and Mexico deciding to pay for it. Trump had just glossed over grossly the factoid that it would be built by Mexico, on Mexican soil and be controlled by them too, therefore it could not be called an 'American Border Wall' for real, but that didn't seem to stop him saying it was, nor his followers from accepting it with a victorious smile.

Apparently, moronism was now a virtue in Trump's America, just like dishonesty and travesty had become such, four years ago at his election. Who knew the man was so 'virtuous'?

Lucas decided to try something new; he closed his eyes and concentrated on the neural interface signal that he was receiving from the NTWW antenna to find the Daleminton's domotics menu and take mental control of the suite's utilities and appliances. A few quick thoughts later and the TV was closed, as surely as if he had tapped the remote keys or told the Alexa module to do it. The smile the teenager made, alone in the twilight of the shadowy room, could be interpreted as either peacefully satisfied or creepily evocative of bad things to come. Since he was alone and nobody saw...

With nothing more to be done in the open portion of the suite, the young man walked over to the dining table to pick up the lit tea set with a newly filled kettle to bring it into the office for a long night of hacking, splicing and cybernetic warfare against the religious tyranny that kicked him out of his own home. He made short work of opening the doors to enter, then locked them tightly before
setting his burden on the low counter besides the inert fireplace.

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 02:30am)

(Western America; 23:30pm)

Taking advantage of his comfortable, and safe, position on the enhanced director's chair, the adolescent kept his eyes closed and his body relaxed as he mentally delved into his private neural network to accomplish the harder, harsher tasks he needed done tonight.

The keys to success as a hacker were; basic competence in a wide skill set covering not only programming but also hardware and public utilities, talents in maths (algorithms, statistics, probabilities), multiple languages and ciphering, and of course, a solid grasp of bureautics to keep your entire system ordered. However, all of that would be for absolutely nothing if you didn't have the two most fundamental capacities for success at anything in life: self-control (patience) and self-regulation (logistics & planning).

Lucas Wolenczak was born a naturally quite patient child, and then had even more self-control beaten and drugged into him during the first 9 years of his life. He had also been naturally inclined to self-regulation from the start and spent the 16 years of his existence to date perfecting the arts of bureautics, management, administration and planning. The fact he was an avid watcher of the 'American Heroes Channel' and supped up everything they showed about World Wars I & II, and all other military actions of importance on the planet, was a determining factor in how he planned his life, his business, and his hacking.

Strategy, Tactics, Logistics, Home-Front and External Supports; the five pillars of military might.

The teenager had learned very young to integrate this method of thinking to all aspects of his life and activities, something which paid off in spades along the years. It kept him alive when Lawrence tried to attack and kill him at his 10th birthday, and again 2 years ago. If he had done like all other kids with violent parents and run away blindly in panic, he would have 'ended' himself by sheer stupidity. Instead, he had looked at his Logistics, thus understanding what Tactics were feasible with his limited body and established a Strategy. But, upon seeing in his Logistics the amount of corporate resources, personnel and money he had, he was able to engage the fourth pillar, home-front, in the form of guards hired by Wise Apothecary's security division, that his father never saw coming, and never thought his son would know how to wield.

An ordinary hacker was limited to his keyboard and a few books or classes he took.

A splicer was better, but still limited to his keyboard and the data feeds from his victims to create and backstop the false reality he wanted to make people believe in.

Compared to the average hackers and splicers, Lucas was so clearly over advantaged with his engineer's knowledge of hardware and utilities from the atoms up, his instinctual grasp of chemical and energetic reactions in the parts, his preternatural ability for perceiving patterns in Nature or man-made synthetics, and the 30-odd languages he spoke or used in life and programming... To add all his experiences as a Baron of Industry in both medical products and industrial electronics that he had acquired on top of it all...

No, he wasn't just an ordinary hacker who wanted to steal a few grand to shop on Amazon for free.

Sitting in his heated massaging chair restively, the teen exploited the Neural Interface to its fullest capacity. Besides him, the D&AC module activated; a large floating bubble of gas lit up with images and crackling neural energy fields, bringing to life the much better and more powerful holoviewer
that Lucas had built. It was his personal version of what he had evolved out of his collaboration with Ms Angela Montenegro, of the Jeffersonian Museum, when he helped her redesign and upgrade her 'Angelator' holographic display table. This large ball of bluish energy had the ability to interface with the nerves and mind of anybody who placed a hand (or head) inside the gas bubble for a few seconds, thus allowing the system to work on them in a non-invasive manner. It had been the primary version of his neural interface, before he developed the non-Newtonian crystalline fluid necessary to craft the permanent implants now set in his head and body.

The console holoviewer allowed for a larger image, better resolution, more 3D depth and far more powerful neural connection than the simple meta-glasses did. This made creating large scale organigrams of the cascade reactions he could/would cause much easier as he could see the entire thing when it was done. The strategizing session lasted almost three hours, taking him into the night's depths. Once he had made his plan, he simply had to carry it out; a rather simple thing really, just a whole lot of grunt work.

Lucas planned a long list of churches, faith-based organizations and religious representatives, lawyers and lobbyists to destroy in the first wave of reprisals he would unleash. It had taken him a long time to compile the list by trawling through the web, letting his custom data mining app find raw subjects so that he could then evaluate and triage them into categories. Presently, he wanted to prioritize those with clearly expressed white-power creed, followed by all other anti-semitic cults, followed by misogynist cults, followed by sects that prone violence or rape against children, closing the lengthy target list with those sects that encouraged people to distrust medicine and use only faith healing in their lives.

It was close to 02:00am when Lucas finally triggered his massive wave of electronic warfare against the apostolates of fascistic christian whiteness. Using his intimate knowledge of banks and the Web Tier-2 interlinks between the planet's great institutions, the teenager had programmed his devastating malware to virulate the entire banking system of the world. The goal was to find, isolate, then fully exterminate all public and private records of property titles, deeds to land, mining claims, taxation forms, revenue logs, bank accounts, investment portfolios, etc... The first wave would target the church/sect organizations themselves; the second wave would eradicate the same files and traces but for the ecclesiastes, their families and their hired personnel, including passports, driving licenses, gun permits, marriage certificates, citizenship or foreign worker visas, etc...

Lucas was going to erase the churches and their bought or defrauded – "rights" – right out of the hands of the governments who were being paid to maintain those powers and continue to blindly ignore the murders, tortures, rapes and frauds they did. If the community was too paralyzed, or dumb, or bought off like a cheap whore, then the teenager would act from the shadowy depths of the Dark Web he knew so well to reach out and hurt several millions of worshipers, all at the same time.

If the American Internal Revenue Service (IRS) with the States and municipal equivalents, had managed to keep their taxation records truly safe and confidential, Lucas wouldn't have been able to use the government's own work product to correctly identify, triage then target all the thousands upon thousands of faith-based 'depravities' he had spotted. Then again, the IRS and the local assessor branches had never before in their existences faced-off against an adversary of his caliber unless they were located in a state-sponsored hacking farm like the Russians have been using for almost 2 decades now.

Trump's white-christian Crusade against the World would get one hell of a Sunday morning gift to inaugurate their first new mass and rites. You can't make war without money to pay the soldiers and equipment, and Lucas planned to bleed then starve the damned wells of poisonous philosophy until even the worst sluts-of-the-pews wouldn't want to participate anymore.
"I accept your declaration of war, Lord Trump; here is my answer, right in your face," the depressed, angry adolescent whispered to the empty room as he set the virus' clock to synchronize the cascading tsunami of electronic wide-area 'logic bombing'.

{ SQ } - { The Rod of Authority is Mine } - { SQ }

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 05:07am)

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Western America; 02:07am)

The teenager disconnected partially from the neural network to give his mind some rest after so many hours of intense virtual world work. Getting up from his chair, he took the time the stretch out his arms and legs, joint by joint to restore proper blood flow and sensitivity. After a few minutes of exercise, he took his goblet for some spiced fruit tea only to remember he had extinguished the alcohol burner an hour ago when he emptied the pot.

"Oh, well..." he sighed, resigned. He would wait to drink with his night snack later on.

Since he had no tea, he turned his attention to the last thing he wanted to do in the office room before leaving it for some sleep. The Design & Auto-Crafting module had finished all the parts it had been tasked with printing, milling or extruding during his foray into cybernetic reality. Using an anti-static padded plastic tray and latex gloves, items he took from the sys-op module's lower storage drawer, he gathered the parts to assemble his first real weapon of this entire damnable voyage. Using an anti-static padded plastic tray and latex gloves, items he took from the sys-op module's lower storage drawer, he gathered the parts to assemble his first real weapon of this entire damnable voyage. Remaining standing to get the minimum of physical effort needed to keep healthy (yeah right!) the adolescent took a set of professional tools from a drawer in the D&AC module then set to work. He used the granite surface of the low service counter next to the inert fireplace as a good flat work area to assemble sensible electronics without creating a short circuit; stone is non-conductive and noncorrodning, therefore a perfect workbench for this type of job.

He quickly wiped clean of all milling oil the tempered steel pistol-grip cane pommel which also had an elongated, curved, hatchet blade and a small hammer-like striking face on the knob side, just like his original walking stick. The entire metallic structure composed of synthesis Damascus alloy had been molded and shaped in a liquid bath to avoid impurities and imperfections. The only 'strange' thing was the tiny glowing blue veins made by the inlaying of psychotronic crystal wires throughout the pommel to create a wireless link between the internal devices and Lucas's mind for a tactical advantage during a fight.

The important electronics went inside and connected to 8 small emitters located around the hammer face but one inch back from the flat striking surface; another 18 emitters in 2 rows of 9 set back from the cutting edge of the hatchet; a single large emitter in the flat top of the joint between hammer and ax. When the contents was finished placing, welding and gluing, he put in the 4 small isotopic batteries and the 2 high-charge capacitors then set the internal sealing plate and washer with some glue and screws.

The adolescent had just assembled an energy weapon that shot invisible beams up to 100 meters, all from the schematics of the UEO's prototype pulse pistols that he had obtained from them last year.

He was, when pushed to it, a tech thief; so what?

It was all in the name of survival, not for sale to mercenaries. For now anyways.

With the pommel complete, Lucas went to the Neuroplexic Thought-Web Weaver module and fished around the tall cabinet until he found what he wanted; two pieces of tempered Damascus steel alloy that he had milled back in Stanford several months ago, just after he was able to stop using the
wheelchair to move around. He had used this particular model of armament-cane in San Francisco but guessed it wouldn't pass into Canada without a fuss, so he had hidden the less critical parts inside the module in prevision of it passing the borderline undetected, camouflaged amongst the mess of pipes and hoses of the NMWW array. The important, and 'unlawful', parts were stored only as schematics in his database on the Internex cloud, accessible through either his neural net or his regular Virtual Private Network, with all the tools and materials needed to craft them already inside the D&AC.

Taking the 3½ foot long barrel and 3 foot long blade of the cane to the bench, he went back to the NMWW to fish out the 6 inch long pike blade, the molded armored rubber sleeve for the barrel, the mechanism parts for the quillons that extended from the pike when it opened and finally the internal spacers and seal plates for inside the barrel. A few other accessory parts had been milled during the evening and were already on the tray for assembly inside the metal pipe.

With everything in hand, Lucas slotted the two-edged long-sword blade to the pommel, aligning the blade so that its edges were facing the same axis as the hatchet's edge; this would allow to try a follow-up strike with a bladed fist if the initial sword strike was deflected upwards during a fight. Once that done, the also precise job of connecting the pulse weapon circuits to 2 medium emitters, one on each side of the blade and aiming along the length, needed several minutes of effort. Once everything was in place, he closed the juncture of blade and pommel with a rubber washer, a two-part seal plate, glue and a screwed retention ring, to make certain the entire weapon was watertight, even at great depths.

The teenager then took up the two-part skeleton of the inner spacing assembly that would fill the inside of the cane barrel; this had a long flat slot to house the main sword and a shorter flat slot for the retractable jack-pike in the lower end. Taking the purely mechanical spring-loaded gears and levers for the pike blade slider, he set them carefully in their planned positions then slid from the top of the spacer array the long round trigger rod for the actuator switch. Once screwed in place, the rod was then linked and screwed to the trigger bascule that would extend or retract the pike blade. After the basic sliding action was done, he set the two quillons on either side of the blade and screwed them to their jointing holes in the tang of the 6 inch double edged spear. That then got slotted inside the slider and screwed tightly to the ejector which was tested a dozen times before anything else was added to the spacer construct.

After the pike mechanism, there were a series of power conduits, amplifiers, isotopic batteries and capacitors that would take the pulse beams from the long-sword's pulse emitters and channel them, as well as boost them, all the way to the lower end of the cane barrel to come out of a circle of 12 medium strength emitters for a punching power similar to a small 3 inch howitzer with a limited 100 meter range. These same electronic systems would also accomplish two other vital jobs. They electrified the retractable spear and the assembly of eight sharpened steel flanges that would be screwed at the foot of the barrel thus making it into a small edged mace to pound through hardened enemies. They also allowed Lucas to connect external systems through a pair of physical sockets, a standard earphone jack and a USB-4 port, plus a miniature optical/infrared lens made out of his personal blue psychotronic crystal. This connectivity would allow him to use the cane as an antenna to boost his communications devices or his link to the neural network without drawing the long blade.

With the internal systems fully built, it was time to set the two-part rubber coated steel sealing rings at
regular intervals. The seals were in halves to make them easier to install or remove during construction and maintenance. He screwed them tightly with a line of glue to make it all air and watertight. Then a series of thin shock absorbing jelly pads were glued along the length between the sealing rings to isolate the electronics from vibrations during combat. After all the contents was finalized, the adolescent slid it slowly into the waiting tube.

The barrel’s main body was a metal pipe completely smooth in and out, made of synthesis Damascus steel alloy inlaid with glowing blue veins of psychotronic crystal wire throughout just like the pommel and all blades. The inside was coated with a thin thermoplastic barrier to avoid electrical shocks or static discharges from all the current and magnetism going around, especially during pulse shots. It also allowed to slide in the spacer assembly quite easily and align it with the two little notches at the bottom of the barrel where the flanged head would be screwed and glued after the electrical connections were securely welded to the conductive pins.

With the internal works in place, Lucas slid the barrel's outer sleeve over the steel tube; it was actually a molded layer of thermoplastic covered on the outside with a thick coat of rubber to add insulation against heat, electricity and magnetism to protect the fragile systems inside the cane. It was this milled, heat pressed, plastic & rubber sandwich that created the decorative ribbed handle by which the barrel was held like a mace when using the long-sword. After the external sleeve was set with glued sealing rings, he screwed the flanged mace head at the foot of the rod and capped the top with the receiver that locked the pommel in place when the cane was not used for fighting.

With all the construction finished at last after an hour, the young man plugged the cane to the Cyberghast Hub with a USB cable to configure the last settings for the frequencies, polarity, strength and visual wavelength of the pulse beam emitters. He tested the main power up then, using only 1% of the true power capacity, aimed the pommel's hammer side towards a small portable device that measured the energies employed by tools or weapons. After testing each pulse emitter on the cane, he then extended the spear and pulled the long-sword out to test the stunning system's strength. With all the laboratory tests done, there was only one thing left to do.

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Eastern America; 06:23am)

(Sunday 20th December 2020; Western America; 03:23am)

Lucas put on his meta-glasses for a full test that demanded he leave the room to go outside on the balcony overlooking the forested backside of the hotel. Walking out of the office, he closed the room’s doors but left them unlocked for the few minutes the test required as with this powerful weapon in hand, he felt safe enough to not be worried anymore. He walked to the living room, then out to the large patio, without a winter jacket and completely careless of the light snowfall that was drifting down lazily towards the already white-cloaked floor. He upped the connection strength with the neural network and polarized the lenses in his meta-glasses to see the effects of the beams when he shot.

He aimed the long-sword's triangular point towards the trees and pulled the trigger; the effect was like a 2-barreled shotgun that was loaded with single-slug shells in both bores. The two condensed beam of invisible energy lanced down the length of the blade then out a full 100 meters to punch right through the high branch of a fir tree, exploding the limb in a shower of vegetal shrapnel, making the severed branch fall noisily to the snowy forest ground below.

The tree limb had been a full 7 inches in diameter.

Turning the hammer head toward the trees he pulled the trigger and a much smaller pulse lanced out, at 100 meters as well, blowing off a 4 inch thick branch from the tree he had targeted. A small smile graced his face as he contemplated another proof of his genius falling to the ground in ruins.
Lucas then held the weapon in front of him with the ax blade aiming to the wooden depths while pressing the hidden trigger. The resulting wide crescent of energy fanned outwards to 100 meters, barely ½ inch thick throughout but 10 feet high at the end of its range shearing off cleanly and silently through hundreds of vegetal limbs along the way. The widespread devastation was pleasing to him, as the severed branches, twigs and pine cones glided down on the wind.

After that wide zone test was successful, there was only one left; he set the long-sword back in the barrel and aimed the lower end at the forest. The blast that resulted when he pulled the trigger was astounding as he had almost no experience with weapons of this sort; all he had planned to date had been theoretical since the first version of the armament cane had been far less powerful. The single concentrated pulse that burst from the combined parts was a full 1½ inch thick continuous beam of raw power that blasted through the main trunk of a tree 13 inches in diameter with enough force to punch clear to the other side with a resounding crack like thunder, shattering the vegetal, instantly making trauma shock reverberation cracks appear along its length, from down in the roots up to the very top of the tall tree. The poor pine looked like it had been hit by lightning from above, not a thin condensed beam from the side.

The teenager had a wide nasty smile plastered on his thin pale features. "Now, this is a weapon that you can plan a strategy with!" he whispered happily to himself, feeling true pride at his accomplishment.

Tactically, it may have a shorter range than a regular pistol which could reach 150 meters in clear climates, but the isotopic batteries would allow for several hundred shots per day, all invisible without flash, smoke, or recoil, with the only limitation being how fast the capacitor banks could charge between each pulse. Compared to physical bullets in magazines that needed to be switched out, this system would truly advantage him for close range combat, with the electrified blades as back-up on top of things.

Pleasantly surprised at how productive the entire afternoon and evening had turned out despite all the depravities of the morning, the teenager decided to allow himself a little celebration before going to bed at long last. He would make himself a meal from the provisions he had stocked then finally take a piece of that decorative mocha-caramel-maple yule log cake. It was high time for some positive events and happiness in his life at long last. With his new – powerful – armament cane clipped to the left side of his tool belt like a sword in a scabbard, the boy extended out his arm, palm up, to let the clear, pure, white snow fall into his hand. The cold wet flakes tickled him, an amusing feeling he hadn't felt in close to two whole years since his very severely limited health and mobility had kept him from traveling anywhere until about five months ago, when he finally left the wheelchair and crutches for good after so many torturous months of physical re-adaptation. Now in a good mood for the first time in several weeks, Lucas closed the patio doors, going in to find his meal so he could have a full warm stomach to make his sleep afterwards truly enjoyable.

The Papal Lord Amerikus tries to motivate support and approval by celebrating the first Low Mass in the newly renovated Rose Garden at the White House. His depraved barbaric ceremonies are interrupted violently when the power, authority, and riches, of his highest bishops and crusaders is broken before the entire world in a manner that can't be hidden from allies or enemies alike. All around the USA, society continues to sink into a flaming pit of its own making, to the chanting of fanatical white christian crusaders who will soon find out they are not alone in their desires for theocracy to replace the Land of the Free. They really should have been weary of asking for things they had no rights to have; the other guys might want some too, and be just as armed as they are.
The damages done on the Sunday morning are too great, the loss of power, prestige, panache, money and allies is too all-encompassing and critical to be survived. The Flagged Crucifer is thrown down, the American Eagle falls from its high perch, and the churches of the gods that don't exist are burning. The population wants freedom from fanatics, crusaders and maniacs, the revolution begins.

The combined DXS and NCIS team go through a hard morning traveling to the airfield to meet their incoming partners and get off the ground at long last. They arrive in Vancouver where they finally meet with Lucas Wolenczak at his hotel to begin their actual mission.
Funeral dirge for human idiocy

The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome. Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } --- { } --- { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

For this chapter, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?
The loud thrumming noise of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules’ four turbo-propellers was sending constant rhythmic vibrations through the airframe of the craft as it powered its way through nasty headwinds coming from the western seaboard due to the damnable windstorm in progress. The cold moisture filled air came from the northern Pacific, traveling down the coast from where Alaska and British Columbia met, passing over the shores of BC and Washington State, then inside Oregon and deeper across California, then doing a hard right even deeper inland across Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The two pilots of the plane were straining hard against their yokes to keep the massive metal beast aloft, occasionally wincing in sympathy with their ship as she groaned under the added stresses of high winds and the freezing water that was slowly accumulating over the hull until it was thick enough to sluice around and pool into patches of slick translucent ice. The two men weren’t new to this type of climate, having flown their plane all over Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas a few times in the peak of winter in the past five years. The pair had been together since being given the large cargo carrier and worked well through sunshine or hailstorms. But, this was actually their first time flying under hostile conditions of any sorts as they had always been assigned to fly domestic deliveries inside the USA mainland.

The fact the first war they experienced in their careers was at home truly didn’t help their morale.

If there was one thing to be grateful for, it was that nobody had managed yet to takeover genuinely dangerous vehicles, so neither expected to be shot out of the air as they flew the mission. There had been some Hummer’s, Bradley’s or Striker’s getting stolen and driven off-road to disappear in the wilderness, but nothing truly catastrophic like an Abrams tank or Apache helicopter. The worse they had heard about, and been confirmed true, was a civilian transportation contractor that lost a box truck full of ATK ammunition for pistols and assault rifles, out of Lake City in Missouri, getting hijacked on the road, but no actual weaponry systems. As if six tons of light ordnance could be thought of as ’not important’ when you thought of the black market value if sold to gangs, and how much violence that could produce in the coming year.

Second-lieutenant Kerry Verdant was tapping a set of orders in the navigation computer to double check their heading and altitude, while his boss major Enrico Calderan held the plane on as straight a course as could be done in the harsh winds they faced. As Verdant verbally confirmed to his boss that their heading was true and stable, the comms beeped an alarm with the digital readout identifying the caller as the US air national guard central air traffic control’s emergency frequency.

Activating the comms, S-L Verdant answered "This is flight ANG C130 – AW 207 ferrying technical personnel to the Los Angeles downtown John Wayne airfield. Copilot Verdant and main pilot Calderan on the horn and listening, over."
The line squeaked a bit then a voice was heard through both their headsets. "This is LA county ANGB – SOF calling on Em-Freq with an advisory of imminent threat. Repeat, this is the LA county Supervisor-of-flights broadcasting an important emergency ADVISORY OF THREAT. The air traffic control management for the extended area of Los Angeles county and joining suburbs has been compromised by enemy forces. Several control towers have been hijacked and set to automatically redirect traffic away from LA county. Physical security on the ground at all LA area airfields is compromised, graded from 'unknown situation' to 'avoid unless in distress' so you are to reroute all flights to other zones proven in the hands of ANG. Over."

Major Calderan pushed the comms button on his headset to take the line; "This is flight ANG C130 – AW 207 requesting instructions for alternate landing facilities. I repeat, this is AW 207 requesting new heading and conditions of approach. Over."

The voice from the comms responded "This is LA county ANGB – SOF back at you AW 207. The closest safe LZ to your destination is just in front of you at the Phoenix Goodyear Airport, call sign GYR. The runway can take your C-130 easily at is can receive & send out Boeing 747. It is located several miles south of Phoenix city and used to be called NAS Litchfield Park until it was closed in 1968 when it was bought by the city. The air national guard, under the 'Noah's Ark' protocol, has secretly rebuilt and equipped full military facilities in hardened underground bunkers beneath the existing obsolete and decrepit hangars. Those surface buildings were rebuilt and reinforced as well, to serve as storm shelters for civilian refugees, if it comes to that. Over."

Major Calderan replied "Copy that, NAGB – SOF. Over."

The air national guard base continued "Flight AW-207, also be advised that all air traffic control operations for the lower half of the US mainland's western seaboard have been centralized at that airfield since it wasn't on anybody's watchlist anymore. It is secure from any hostile forces, domestic or foreign, as only personnel cleared under NAP prerogatives were given access to the site. Your crew and passengers WILL be scanned and validated upon arrival before any other activities or access to the rest of the site. Over."

S-L Verdant swore under his breath before addressing his superior. "Hey, boss! The navy cops? What do we do about them?"

Toggling the comms again, major Calderan asked the controller "ANGB – SOF please advise; we have NCIS personnel from New Orleans en-route to Los Angeles as part of the 'Noah's Ark' redistribution of assets & capacities. What do I tell them? Over."

The reply came immediately "Receiving your question, flight AW-207. It will be processed by the national guard general staff at NAS Litchfield Park during your landing and processing. Your passengers should inform their own command structure if at all possible. We have too much comms traffic to handle with all the hundreds of airplanes still not safely down on the ground and air patrols to supervise. Normally, we'd do that call ourselves, but we haven't got all our tech staff inside the walls so we have to prioritize and delegate. Over."

"Copy that, ANGB – SOF. Over and out." major Calderan replied neutrally. Turning to his copilot, he told him simply "Get in the back, tell the navy cops the sit-rep and have one jack into the comms array to contact their bosses in LA to settle this. It ain't our problem, and it ain't gonna be."

Second-lieutenant Verdant walked slowly into the cargo compartment of the C-130, passing alongside the pallet of freight that was being shipped along the 24 troops. Mostly preserved food like MRE’s or powdered soup stocks, water filtration unit, portable generator & fuel, folded camp tents &
cylinder stoves, etc... A full non-motorized occupational base-camp setup. The heavy weight had been set in the middle of the plane, with the passengers at the rear towards the boarding ramp to even out the weight around the aircraft. Landing with a tail-heavy Hercules was feasible, for some with experience, but taking off the ground with an unbalanced load at the rear was asking for trouble unless you had a long, well paved runway. Not something that was easy to find along the southern USA's landmass these days with Mother Nature hammering them the way she did.

Barely a few seconds were needed to reach the ingenious system they had taken onboard to ferry the passengers. It was a special pallet composed of a 6 inch thick steel box-base, 4 rows of 8 folding seats, steel framed back-rest locker & overhead netting for storage, a front-block composed of two self-contained wet bath cabins (dry toilet, ionic/sonic shower, water faucet), and a drinkable water tank with in-pipe heater cleverly built into the box-base so people could prepare a hot drink or MRE (Military Meal-Ready-to-Eat). This design would never win an "Airline comfort award" under any circumstances, but it was certainly better than what the old Hercules normally gave her passengers.

Originally designed as purely cargo with 2 flight crew, the ship's structural elements had been pared down so much at conception that there were only four 'small' folding seats for passengers just next to the cockpit's door. Anybody else had to stand or sit on the floor, unless special accommodations were brought aboard to carry more people. And having more persons in this flying coffin was NEVER the recommendation of the USAF since the aircraft did not have – ANY – necessities for maintaining human life other than the climate control devices. That meant no toilet, no sink, no microwave oven, nothing at all, not even an actual trashcan in the cockpit. The only amenities granted were the two massive piloting chairs with individualized breathing apparatus and wired comms lines but nothing else, especially not for passengers.

Somebody a few years back had thought about just how stupid that actually was. In the case of a crisis that needed to ferry a large number of ready-for-action soldiers to a mission spot, the Pentagon's plan had been limited to 'order' some civilian airlines into an emergency lease of several airplanes until the mess was resolved. This included forcibly assigning flight and cabin crew to the planes under this lease, regardless of the normal ways the airlines and unions attributed jobs and schedules. The man who had the realization of just how stupid that thought-process was decided to not sit on his hands like a twit; he called a company called amusingly enough 'Force Provider' that was already an established partner of the Pentagon. Their specialty was in fact the palletization or containerization of mobile machineries and services for military and civil security purposes. They had kitchens, infirmaries, garages, armories, electricity generators, water treatment plants, climate-controlled personnel dormitories, and so on, built inside articulated extensible steel shipping containers.

With a quick agreement to buy the man's idea for a few tens of thousand dollars, Force Provider Inc. rapidly designed and produced this simple but efficient way to convert the venerable but user-unfriendly plane into something a group of humans could find livable for a few hours. The entire system was prepped in the airbase hangar, filled with fresh water, toilet paper, large enamel mugs, cheap coffee grinds with dry powdered condiments, a can of bulk tomato/veg soup mix, and a pack of redundantly linked industrial rechargeable batteries that lit the emergency satellite phone and lights. The whole thing was picked up by a huge forklift that drove it into the cargo hold of the plane as-is. Tie down a few chains to the airframe's floor and 'voilà!' instant passenger section for 32 'large' persons wearing body armor with a rifle, duffel bag and carry-on.

Verdant smirked as he thought of all the generals and admirals that bitched like little ninnies every time they had to travel on a C-130 without the passenger kit. Having to go out of view behind the crates of payload to crouch down while holding a plastic bag under their ass to relieve themselves (and make a sloshy smelly mess) was a sure-fire way to make even the brass less uppity towards the flight crews.
Snort!

If the cheap civilian elected buffoons from back in the sixties had decided to pay for a good people-friendly design, they'd have their precious water commodes and coffee pots, and the rest of the military would get to enjoy them too, when caught aboard the flying fat barges. Chuckling at the thought of the many unhappy civilian politos that he had flown around on "Get to know the air national guard" junkets organized by the Pentagon to drum up a better budget, the lieutenant was in a much better mood as he approached the two navy cops.

Looking at setup the NCIS agents had, Verdant was reminded no so subtly that many things don't change easily, even in the midst of a civil war exploding all around their ears. The two cops were in the left-hand row of chairs, facing each other, at the very end of the seating pallet while the 24 guardsmen were all bunched together in the front rows near the sanitation block. That left one full row of empty chairs between the cops and the soldiers, with the extra pair on the right hand being used by the NCIS agents to stow their own portable base-camp & winter gear. Shaking his head at the clear delimitation between the persons, and the almost paranoid separation of the soldiers from the police as if they were guilty of something they were hiding, the copilot steadied himself on the left bulkhead against a few seconds of turbulence then marched on, his message needing to be delivered no matter what.

Delivering the bad news wasn't going to go over easily, though. Both federal agents were dressed in dark blue BDU's with flak vests with many pockets integrated, heavy combat boots, fingerless gloves with visible steel plating and reinforced ball caps with a front light and comms built-in, all bearing a large colored NCIS logo. Brand new equipment being field tested on-the-go under real-life conditions alongside the tested & true Sig Sauer P228 pistols fitted with lights, laser pointer and optics for medium-range shots and a pair of Colt M4A1 assault rifles with extended 60 shot mags, 6" bayonet, M203 grenade launchers, flashlights, Barrett Vari-Scope and laser pointer. These two were carrying enough hard steel to be confounded for extra guardsmen or SWAT on their way to a situation.

Maybe that was why the NG's stayed separate? Cuz they wuz scared? Eh eh eh!

"Agents!" he shouted over the loud bass thrumming of the four propeller engines, "We have a situation in progress that you need to know about."

Verdant waited to make certain they both looked at him and could hear him enough. He decided though, to sit in the chair next to the male policeman, near the center of the arrangement since there was just a bit less noise away from the outer hull so his voice would be better heard without screaming his head off like a loon.

"Okay; here's the sit-rep! About ten minutes ago, we were contacted by the ANG - SOF out of Phoenix at Litchfield Park AFB with news that all the airfields around Los Angles county have been sabotaged with the air traffic personnel in place assassinated and the servers hijacked to deviate flights away from LA. That means that right now, they don't have anybody in towers to guide in airplanes to land safely so the Brass decided to keep on sending flights elsewhere until his lot here gets in place."

The female agent, Tammy Gregorio, passed roughly a weary hand through her long brown hair, setting behind her ear as she asked "I gather the ANG has already given you an alternative landing zone? We'll need to get some ground transport to LA to reach our mission group, no matter what. I don't see director Vance or EAD Mosley canceling this job for anything. Were you informed about this?"

"Yes ma'am. We were told that you would now get on the comms to call your Boss and hash it out
with them. However, just so you know; the airport we're landing at used to be the 'Litchfield Park AFB' during WW-II until it was shuttered in the sixties and bought by the city that renamed it Phoenix Goodyear Airport. Now, because of the 'Noah's Ark' protocols the entire old military part of the base has been secretly refurbished, and even the decrepit surface buildings aren't what they seem. I'm sure our Brass has trucks ready to roll to LA overnight. After all, they have this lousy bunch to get there to take over the airport security and basic functions anyways, so... You'll probably just be hitching a ride with us that way too."

The male agent spoke up then "Thanks for the heads-up. We'll call our two managers and see what happens from there. Our next trip was with a heavy MD-11C out of JWA, but if the tower isn't operational at that point, we're gonna need options. Can you just give us the procedure to jack into your comms? We'll do the rest from there."

The Lt. Showed them the power, comms and network sockets on the outer bulkhead, then gave them verbally the user name & password that would give them access during the flight. He specified to them that these changed each time the plane landed or took off to avoid getting hacked because they had the same access login too long. With how many careless civilians they ferried in a year, plus the number of fools with nothing to do but hack into the army's network, they had no choice but to be this stringent with their onboard electronics or risk getting a crypto-locker virus mid-flight.

Sebastian Lund got his laptop situated with the appropriate wires to connect with the planes powerful comms array to contact NOLA and LA together to get their directives. No matter the circumstances, it wasn't their call to make; the Bosses would decide if they continued or turned back.

DXS - NCIS bad news for the night

(NCIS - NO – opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 02:10am
Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 23:10pm
Deeks House
Los Angeles, California, USA

The nine persons present in the building were sitting calmly in the large stately home's ground floor living room, at the front of the edifice, overlooking the completely dark, empty street. With all the streetlights not lighting up tonight for reasons unknown, there was only pale sickly light from the weak moon above. In forlorn places, a few stray rays of artificial brightness peeked out from the cracks in the blinds or curtains of those houses that were occupied. Even then, the rare properties with living people inside were thoroughly locked up, or even barricaded like the Deeks family had done.

If the windows had been opened, the people assembled in the room could have heard the low winds carrying across the neighborhood the vague sounds of scared residents banging hammers, cutting materials with powersaws, or using power drills to screw odds and ends. Those new installs typically related to plywood panels or corrugated steel sheets as window shutters, security cameras and raising existing backyard fences, sometimes with metal points or barbed wire. All these panicked, last minute modifications were being done under the cover of darkness, in the hopes of avoiding hostile scrutiny from potential thieves, or worse. Roberta and Julia had seen during the day two of the neighbors drive home, rather unsafely in their haste, and get out of their cars with long thin cardboard boxes that were imprinted with the brand-names of hunting gun manufacturers.
Saiga shotguns seemed all the raging fashion in these dreary days.

Marty was sitting comfortably with Kensi nestled besides him on the small couch (3 seats) located centrally near the fireplace, while observing Riley and Diane who sat on the other small couch across the card-&-games table. Mac and Bozer were seated in peaceful contemplation together on the far large couch (4 seats) that was near the two women they knew. Roberta and Julia had opted to sit in another large couch near their family, quietly sipping some warm tea as they watched just how close and in-love their two adult children had become over the last year. Jack Dalton walked in from his aside to the powder room, going to sit at the card table, nearest to Diane so he could listen in to the conversation she had with her daughter about coming events.

The two teams of professionals were enjoying a few last minutes of quietude with their loved ones before hitting the road for a very uncertain trip to a foreign country. Their all too short moment to gather some inner strength was rudely interrupted by a sudden, strident alarm sounding around the entire house. Both Marty and Kensi groaned in dismay together, raising their faces to the ceiling in tandem.

"Damn!" Kensi griped angrily, "What did they do this time?" she asked nobody in particular as she rubbed her hands down her face.

"No use crying about it now." Marty said despondently as he stood up and extended his arm to help his fiancée up from her own comfortable, warm position in the crook of the couch nearest the fire. "Come on sweetie, the Boss Lady wants us on the horn pronto. It wouldn't ring that tone if it weren't an emergency."

Grabbing the offered arm, Kensi pulled to help herself to her feet and out of her funk in one single fluid movement, still grumbling about bad luck and worse planning in the same breath.

The DXS team stood up to follow without being told, as it was pretty sure that any mess involving the NCIS crew would impact their entire mission, not just the trip to Vancouver. It was THEIR plane they were using after all, if it still functioned. They needed to know what was going on, which would be faster and simpler if they heard it all from the original source instead of being told an abstract later on, possibly missing details critical for DXS operations.

The six concerned people filed into the ground floor office so Kensi could log into the NCIS comms server to see what the newest problem to curse them happened to be. Opening the glass panel and letting the security scanner read her thumb print took barely a few seconds followed by manually typing in the VPN password to activate the ciphered linkup, and they were online with the Spanish House, the ancient dilapidated building that was home to NCIS – OSP in Los Angeles.

"Oh, hey guys! Glad to see you aren't on the road yet!" exclaimed Nell Jones the moment the image stabilized at both ends. "We have a bit of a pickle in progress, if you'll allow me the expression."

Smiling quickly at them, much more peppy than the hour should allow for, she stepped aside to leave some space in the view for Executive Assistant Director (Pacific) Mosley to take over the conversation.

"Agent Blye, detective Deeks, DXS agents, I wish I were calling with better news." the black skinned woman spoke in strong steady tones. "I need to inform you that we are having an unforeseen delay in getting the NOLA agents over to Los Angeles on schedule due to several acts of assassination and sabotage at multiple crucial airports around the area of LA county. It looks like an organized group is trying to blockade the national guard from accessing the zone they had targeted to deploy their ground troops for the pacification of civil unrest. The hack at John Wayne airport wasn't an isolated incident. We have reports of six other airfields, public and private, getting hit in the same fashion in the last 5 hours. That means that the entire county is now short on available, competent, air
traffic personnel and therefore they are now – legitimately – routing incoming flights elsewhere unless they are proven to be in distress and no longer airworthy."

"Damn." Kensi deadpanned, "What does that mean for our trip? Can we still leave by air?"

Mosley answered calmly "Yes, the mission goes on. The young doctor Wolenczak happens to be critical for too many reasons of national interest to be allowed to simply fade away in Canada's snow banks." Smirking a bit, the mature woman quipped "Given his pasty skin complexion, I do hope you get to him before he takes a sightseeing stroll in the forest, otherwise finding him won't be an easy task for you."

Studiously ignoring the wide-eyed open-mouthed faces made by Nell and Kensi who couldn't believe the top boss had made such a 'funny' during a public meeting, Mosley pursued her conference, quite satisfied at the reactions, especially given the smirk Marty wore as he winked at her through to monitor.

"Well, now, the national guard C-130 was forced to land somewhat – outside – the LA county zone. They touched down in Phoenix, in Arizona, about twenty minutes ago," the director deadpanned in neutral words. "The guard commandment decided that it would be safer to disembark their troops at an airfield that they knew was securely in friendly hands rather than risk arriving at an installation devoid of air traffic crew. The threat of potential insurgents laying in wait to shoot at the planes as they commit final approach was not ignored either. The guard felt it was better, and safer, to ferry their men over ground for the time being, until they can establish permanent control of the situation and facilities. As such, agents Gregorio and Lund will be arriving directly at JWA in about 6 hours."

Mosley's stance changed minutely as she continued the briefing. "I was assured by the national guard brass at Litchfield Park AFB that they had buses and trucks ready to take the entire load from the C-130, to bring it here in respectable time. Therefore, you might want to take a short nap before heading to the airport, to be refreshed and more energetic. Also, and not incidentally, this would keep you all out of the hair of the detachment of marines that are supposed to be reclaiming control of the tower and control station over there. I would prefer it if you didn't arrive on site before 05:00am, just to be on the safe side of things. Let's not give the jar-heads an excuse for some unfriendly fire 'accidents' between agencies, shall we?"

It was Jack who asked out loud "Excuse me Ma'am, but are you saying you think that the marines can't be trusted anymore? As in, the entire corps is compromised or something?"

"No, mister Dalton, I do not believe the US Marines are compromised as an institution. However, it is a well known fact, for several decades in truth, that there are active neo-nazi and skinhead supporters inside ALL branches of the USA military, police and governance. The 'Papal Lord' didn't materialize out of the clear blue sky like a miracle, no matter what he may want to make the populace believe. The deplorable truth is that, just like the ugly exfiltration missions of this morning, all the directors of all the law enforcement, intelligence and military institutions of the country are finding out just how many moles, spies, and saboteurs, we have been harboring and training in the methods by which they are now attempting to betray and destroy us. This is not a good period for honest people, agent Dalton, and those who wear a badge in the name of the real Law of America should be weary of their surroundings at all times. Especially if other humans with badges and guns are present."

Marty Deeks asked "In the event that the DXS team's plane is grounded by circumstances, what do we do then? Do we call in or skip straight to plans B, C, and D, etc... until we hit something that will transport us all up north?"

Mosley seemed to think for a few seconds then responded slowly, as she wasn't certain she wanted
to proceed to far beyond a certain effort for this mission. "Normally, I would prefer being informed of any major changes in mission parameters. That includes the method of transport because I will have to coordinate with the customs agencies of both USA and Canada to obtain your passage and safe, legal arrival into our northern neighbor's land. Let us never forget people, that Canada may be foreign territory, and must be treated as such, but is not in any ways a hostile enemy. Respecting the process isn't just a nicety, it will allow you to walk the streets and intervene openly as agents of the US government without getting shot as terrorists or spies. Plus, if you need new transport, NCIS – LA could have a few strings to pull that make things faster, or at least easier. Hetty would certainly have a few 'old friends' owing her favors that could be put to contribution, if needs be."

Kensi gave the people in the office around her a look then said "Okay. We'll take a four hour lie-down then call in at around 04:30am to get sit-rep on the airfield to make sure we aren't driving into an ambush."

Mosley gave them all a bland smile (#2; day job - enigmatic boss) then moved out of the screen, leaving them with Nell to finish the conversation. The still surprised young intel analyst quickly gave them the new VPN passwords and indicated which cipher key to use during the coming 24 hours until it changed at midnight tomorrow.

NCIS dark hours of the night

(NCIS - NO – opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 02:45am
Western America; Saturday 19th of December, 2020; 23:45pm
Western side of the state
Arizona, USA

Standing idly just outside the massive front doors of above-ground Hangar #4 of the rebuilt Litchfield Park Air Force Base, the thin wiry young man waited alone besides the two inert dark blue SUV's bearing US National Guard plates and decals. Despite the freezing temperature, the howling winds and falling rain, he stood in open air with his hands deep in his cold weather coat's pockets, it's hood pulled over his head to keep dry. Right now, with the thoughts swirling chaotically inside his aching head, it was better to be out of doors than stuck inside with the ceaseless hum of neon tube lighting and stale recycled atmosphere that would eventually make him nauseous.

He needed this short-lived period of solitude as he was trying real hard to remember just how his placid, peaceful, and well-ordered lonely little life had taken such a tailspin into the Twilight Zone as of late. Passing a weary hand over his short, well groomed brown beard, he contemplated the fact that at 39 years old he was, in fact, still a 'young person' since he hadn't officially reached the 'middle age' part of his life. Why then, did he feel like a worn out old man?

He should have stayed just a forensic tech, safely ensconced inside the laboratory with nothing more dangerous than live reagents in the freezer and four closets full of poisonous chemicals. Those things, he could understand and deal with easily enough to no longer panic at their sight, or worry about them at odd hours anymore. Habit, familiarity or desensitization, take your pick of which term you preferred, he'd finally managed it with his basic work environment. Then he got weird on himself and went willingly for a full-out change of everything.

Rampaging fanatical thugs with guns and knives were a mystery to him. He could hunt and arrest
them, even shoot them easily enough, but he could never enter their minds like Dwayne Pride and Christopher Lasalle could, when the needs of the case were dire. Even their female agents Sonja Percy and his current mission partner Tammy Gregorio could do a rather evolved psychological profile on the fly, while he still labored to match motives and emotions with material evidence that didn't always want to calmly stay still inside a petri dish.

Dwayne told him he was overthinking the situation, that he would evolve as he took in life, experience and the several hundreds of cases necessary before reaching the levels of instinct that he and Chris had taken decades through several different law enforcement jobs to obtain. This was both logical and true, just simply his damnable bad habit of doubting himself and his hard-earned capacities that kept rearing its ugly head every other week, no matter how much encouragements his team gave him.

Panning squinted green eyes across the vast expanse of the – supposedly – abandoned military sector of the Phoenix Goodyear Airport, Sebastian had to admit that some people had taken the execution of preparations for the 'Noah's Ark' protocols far more seriously than the NCIS-NOLA team had done. The forensics specialist still wondered about WHY exactly that was. He could easily remember the reasons that Dwayne Pride had given them each year, when the time to do a prep review had come, but the scientist was having problems reconciling the known facts and with the justifications. If his doubts were true, then the person he thought of as a good friend was either a traitor who supported a religious nutcase, or he had simply been unconvinced of the necessities spoken by director Vance and chosen to ignore the domestic emergency response plans. Honestly, Sebastian wanted that Pride simply hadn't had the time or resources to put in place physically reinforced fall-back locations and provisions, especially with the FBI investigation and internal audit that happened in the last 2 years. The alternative cause for not preparing to this level didn't bear thinking aloud.

Movement in the corner of his eye made him turn around quickly, his hands going to the Sig Sauer pistol and combat knife sheathed to the belt he wore over his long winterized trench coat. The walking figure made a vague hand gesture of her own, setting him at ease with recognition. His partner had finally finished sending their report to their NOLA, LA and Washington DC offices over the national guard's secure lines and they could now leave the area to reach Los Angeles.

"Hey, Seb!" agent Gregorio called out in a tired but friendly tone. "We need to wait a few minutes for the grunts to finish loading their kits in the pair of deuce's they're using for the convoy then we can roll out of this place for good. Just another 10 to 15 minutes, max. So, if you need the can or a hot coffee for the trip, go get it. I don't know if the NG's will stop anywhere on the way to eat or take care of other stuff."

Looking over at the SUV's again, agent Lund stepped closer to his partner to answer in a normal voice despite the pounding rain that was creating a haze in the air all around them. The weather along the southern areas of the USA was truly execrable at this time of year.

"No, I'm good. I used the restroom when they had us in their waiting area to pass the ID checks. And I already made sure the truck would have a few things in it to keep us fed and awake for the road. There's a half-gallon thermal carafe of fresh black coffee with brown sugar cubes & powdered cream aside. I grabbed us some granola & fruit bars to munch on if we can't stop for a decent meal, but the kitchen guys gave us a plastic box with a mix of tuna, ham and chicken sandwiches so we had something solid to start the trip with. Unfortunately, no side dishes and nothing hot besides the coffee. The trucks aren't set up as campers so they don't have a powerful enough electrical system to have a microwave oven and not enough space to put one anyways. Same for anything with propane, not enough place to do it safely. So we're going to have to tough it out on cold limited rations until LA. Sorry about that."
Giving her male friend a shallow, tired smile in understanding, Tammy shook her head, saying aloud "No, man... That's already a lot better than I expected. Truly, I thought we'd have to live off rainwater gathered through the car's windows on the roll and nothing else, so this is very good. I'm glad you're a worrywart; it comes in handy on emergency red-eye trips like this."

Responding to her compliment and good sentiments with a simple nod of the head, he did have a question to voice though; "Are we together in one truck or do we drive separately? There are two cars here, ready to go, and I saw the NG's prep both for immediate departure. Do you know the convoy protocols the guard are putting in place?"

Using her hands to make certain her long brown hair stayed safely inside her hood, away from the bone-chilling rain, Tammy answered "Yeah, about that. We're sharing one with a pair of NG's that will be the driver and shotgun. The second car will have a pair of Military CID (Criminal Investigative Division) agents that are going over to LA as extra manpower for the regular NCIS operations around the container port. They had a spate of sailors that abandoned post, stealing data or equipment as they did. In the comms room downstairs, I was told about something involving a Bradley fighting vehicle running amok... Anyways, we're shacking up in this one, and the jar-heads are in the other. Our duffel's and mission gear are already all in place."

An uninvited guest

(NCIS-LA - opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 05:18am
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 02:18am
Dovecote; Hetty Lange's house
Los Angeles, California, USA

The unlit houses, all as dark as the depth of the night they were in, passed by slowly as the shiny silver car rolled towards it destination in a way that could be called arrogant nonchalance, if inert machinery could be lent emotions and attitude. In this case, it was mostly due to the diminutive driver's justly proportioned sense of self-importance and realistic evaluation of her passengers' capacity for self-defense. If anybody tried to stop this car to steal from them, or kidnap them, they would be getting the shock of their lives, and not live long enough to cry about it.

Hetty Lange had been surprised, but not that much, by the extensive preparations for the 'Noah's Ark' protocols committed by EAD Mosley behind everybody's backs. Saturday evening, after agent
Blye and detective Deeks had left, the Pacific Region manager had gathered the OSP sector heads in the conference room next to the Operations Suite to divulge the numerous buildings, facilities and services she had managed to 'discretely' procure and set aside for a rainy day, such as now befell them all. The woman had been at it since she became EAD-PAC five years ago. She had discretely used the visits she had to do at all US Navy installations to scout the base or local NCIS building, find new emplacements, and then set construction plans to fortify everything for a prolonged siege during an insurrection when nobody would send them help.

Several agents were greatly relieved to see just how competent, how foreseeing the mature woman had proven to be, and the assiduity she had demonstrated in creating the best prepared network of safe-houses and enclaves in the entire NCIS organization. Others however, those much closer to Hetty from the start of their implication in NCIS, had been blindsided quite badly by the news and had frozen stiff, unable to decide what emotion dominated their mind at the time. At least, they hadn't made a scene with ill-conceived accusations of dishonesty or treason. Harley Hidoko reminding everyone pointedly that the orders for 'Noah' came from the top career (non-elected) chairs in DOD & DOJ, along with orders of discretion and non-disclosure unless the protocols were engaged, did calm a lot of spirits in a judicious manner.

The rest of Saturday evening had not been easy inside the Spanish House; there were palpable tensions between Sam Hanna, Grisha Callen, Eric Beale and Nell Jones on one side, and Mosley, Hidoko, and pretty much everybody else in the building on the other side. Hetty wound up the proverbial pillock stuck in the middle of the killing field with both sides wanting a piece of her hide on a stake.

She should have stayed retired when she had a chance, last year after returning from Vietnam. But no. She was a career intelligence officer, a dedicated federal law enforcement agent, and she knew from her many contacts around the country – and planet – that her services were yet needed in earnest, especially given the queer symptoms emanating from the White House since the 2016 election. There had been signs and symptoms since 2008, of course there were, but not from the C-I-C being an incompetent, criminalized, whack-job the way this one was. And the 2020 elections last November had been a complete bust of unmitigated proportions. Some 47% of the inscribed electors had been filmed and manually counted at the polling office doors, but the numbers of votes recorded by the machines was around 30% over that for a supposed 62% turnout! Somebody had hacked the polling systems and guaranteed that Trump would be elected again, regardless of legal or social woes in progress.

The Russians had done it; just to keep things clear and simple.

Not.

NOTHING was ever clear, let alone simple, when the quagmire of Russia's politics, military planning and oligarchs got involved in anybody's country. The USA wouldn't fare any better or understand more of the plans in motions than Europe or China did when they were on the receiving end of the Kremlin's 'special friendship' gifts and attention. Especially since such gifts were poisonous, and the attention was that of a stalker that wanted you alone in a dark, locked room to ravage your virtue, health and sanity out of you. Such nice people, the GRU were. Nothing like the old KGB had been. SNORT!

And so Hetty was, after a prolonged day of miserable, execrable news and commotions, driving her silver Mercedes-Benz back home, with a full load of passengers and cargo. Her luxury car had been stuffed like the station-wagon of a soccer-mom taking her kids camping for the weekend. If only! Kids would be making a racket in the car with their music, games and complaints, not staying
morosely silent out of depression and anxiety while glaring out the windows with a pistol in one hand and a knife in the other, just in case.

When Mosley had announced the activation of the NCIS Redoubt in the sector of old decrepit warehouses and manufactures near the city's massive container port, dozens had accepted eagerly to move their family and dependents over to the large complex. Others like Deeks had a large heavily reinforced house that could serve as a detached outpost so they weren't moving into the NCIS enclave, while others still preferred to create their own fortified emplacements, farther away from the boss to keep some of their independence from her direct authority.

Hence, Hetty now had mister Callen and Miss Kolchek as house-guests for the foreseeable future. There was even a good chance that she would be hosting mister Beale and miss Jones later on, as they both lived in rather ordinary, not very secure, apartment buildings and they both needed far better surveillance and maintenance than being left alone after their work shift. The conditions these days really meant that no one was safe alone anymore; the best surety was in numbers, even if some of those numbered may not be up to snuff yet. It was better to keep the couple near her heart than let them loose in the wind to lose them to the hazards of civil war and the unfettered criminality that was spreading across the country.

The elderly woman was brought out of her musings by the sight of her large tall manor house, and the large black SUV parked in the driveway, a little to the right-hand side of the lane to allow access to the garage door. The closed, inert vehicle had rather conspicuous US DOD plates and decals with a phone number and website to contact if the car was found damaged or abandoned without officers/agents nearby.

As the 10 foot tall wrought-iron fence open automatically to let in the silver Mercedes-Benz, the old woman was left to wonder just how that vehicle had entered her property without setting off the multitude of alarms that had been added in the last three years, following the spate of break-ins, kidnapping plots and assassination attempts. Not to mention she had used Dovecote as a witness safe-house twice in that time, for miss Kolchek and her father Arkady, and for an old friend from the Agency that needed a bolthole in preparation for a silent getaway out of the country because an operation inside the US mainland had gone bad.

Hetty had no idea who that was that came to pay her a visit, but the number of enemies she had made during her 40 year CIA career had been quite impressive by both the quantity and sheer diversity of people she pissed off enough that killing her became a personal crusade. Given the political and religious climate in Washington DC, and the fact she was a part Slav – part Romani midget with a nastier disposition than a basket of well-shook african bees... Let's just say the elderly woman had valid reasons to think this was a hit on her, carried out during the civil unrest specifically to mask the evidence under the ongoing chaos that would allow the assassin's trail to go cold by inaction since nobody would bother with investigating anything in these times.

"Prepare yourselves for a hot exfil, people! We have company that I didn't invite!" she called out to her stressed passengers.

"I'll take the kitchen patio doors." Callen replied, shoving the car door open to jump out as the Benz slowed to 5mph to coast into its usual outside parking spot. The man quickly ran out and around the corner of the mansion house, Sig in one hand, knife in the other.

"I'll take the main entrance while you go in through the garage and mud room. Be safe, Henrietta! Father would mourn your passing." The female DEA agent said quietly as she opened and closed her door with nary a sound, being discrete out of habit despite the car's engine noise would already have alerted the perps inside the house to Hetty's arrival. At this point, all three were hoping the
enemy hadn't put watchers in the windows or taken over the extensive security system. If either situation had occurred, then the opposition already knew how many and who they were, as well as how they were coming in. This could get ugly real fast.

Hetty finished parking the luxury car and made as if to enter through the small personnel door on the right-hand of the garage door that led to the internal 6-place parking and the controls for the doors and garden sprinkler system. As she walked almost to the front of the car, preparing to turn right or duck and roll out of enemy fire, the house's main entrance door opened to reveal, backlit from the house's inside illumination, a tall brown haired man wearing the standard dark blue 3-piece suit of government agents and a badge hanging from his waistcoat pocket. The man greeted Anna with his hands in front of him, showing clearly he wasn't a threat, thus causing the young woman to gesture at the elderly woman to join her.

Griping about clusterfucks in progress all the ways, Hetty marched to the main door, carrying her briefcase on a bandoleer at her left side to free her hands. She used the few seconds of walk to discretely check the two Glock 26 pistols in holsters under each arm, and the two NAA .22 Magnum mini revolvers mounted to wrist-rigs on each forearm. A slight wiggle of the hips made sure she could confirm the position of her knives around her pants' waistline since she could always feel those strapped to her ankles with the extra Glock magazines. Arriving abreast of the very 'obvious' G-man, she gazed at his credentials to behold the titles for combined US Navy Intel / UEO Navy posting.

Damn. The idiotic 'internationals' had just landed in her patch.

As if Mosley wasn't enough to deal with already.

Wasn't the team of cracked-pots from the CIA two years ago enough shite to drop on them? And Vietnam? Need she recount anew the harrowing tales of Vietnamese mafia torture from last year to get some understanding and peace at home?

Ah, bother!

The elderly agent saw the man was about the same age as detective Deeks, but far better shaven and coiffed, although he did seem to be as athletic. He only had one sidearm visible in the regulation under-arm holster at his left side, but Hetty wouldn't bet on him not having a drop-piece and knives. In this day and age, even the pacifists seemed to understand the value of carrying heavy & plenty to stay safe. While the old woman didn't distrust him on first sight per se, he was the one standing inside the portico of her own domain, acting as if he was doing them a favor by allowing them in. The nerve of the man!

"Madam Lange, agent Kolchek, I am sorry to intrude on your privacy at this hour but our 'principal' insisted that she would be welcome at all times and to skip on finding a hotel. We didn't have much time to do much else than land the plane and drive here, since reaching LA. I do hope this does not inconvenience you," the bodyguard spoke out in bland monotone words. His lack of care for the situation couldn't be more clear unless he was carrying a placard with pink fluo text to say so.

Hetty glared at him for a good five seconds before he got the message – belatedly – and let the two females pass inside the house proper. As soon as she passed the vestibule, Hetty had her nose in the air, an odd odor grabbing her attention and triggering her defensive instincts at the same time. Who was it that dared to install themselves in her kitchen enough to be cooking those sorts of complicated meals?

Guiding the now befuddled Anna Kolchek and a silently amused escort through the ground floor into the eating area, they passed the formal dining room, butler's pantry and the informal breakfast nook to enter the actual kitchen.
Just in time to see Grisha Callen sitting at the large island's bar with a napkin stuck in the neckline of his T-shirt as he dug into a meal of roast turkey with trimmings, sides and cranberry sauce.

Henrietta stood there like the proverbial spare prick, mouth open as she tried to understand the picture until movement in the corner of her left eye caught her attention. She turned around just in time to see a short (but still taller than her by a foot, dammit!) plump elderly woman with lustrous silvery hair and puffed pink cheeks dressed in casual cream-colored slacks and blouse with discrete tasteful jewelry that clashed horribly with the stained full-set apron she wore. Said cheap vinyl apron was old, frayed and creased by decades of usage, bearing on the chest portion a detailed rendering of a red horned devil with spiked tail and small bat wings that was busy poking at something inside a large cauldron resting on glowing blue flames.

Recognizing easily the Hell-spawned creature of damnation that was even now proffering a baking sheet full of warm fresh-from-the-oven custard tartlets to an amused Anna Kolchek, Henrietta could only come up with one intelligible thought to articulate through her disquieted mind.

"Oh, bugger it all! Wasn't the blasted civil war enough offal to wade through already?"

DXS – NCIS road to the airport

(MacGyver – 1985 opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 07:40am
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 04:40am
All over town
Los Angeles, California, USA

Jack Dalton yawned as wide as his home state, scratching at a few itches at the same time, as he did the final check on the cargo compartment on his SUV. The two teams had gotten four hours of sleep and a quick shower afterwards to help them wake up, but after the day they had lived, it was barely enough to be functional. Everybody hoped the plane would be safe so they could have another nap in flight.

While the professional soldier looked over the equipment, Riley, Mac and agent Blye were in the office again to get sit-rep on the airport's condition and call in to the plane to get positive confirmation on the aircraft's viability for action. Bozer and Deeks were in the basement bunkers getting extra stuff for a longer mission and the possibility they would get stuck north of the border until things in the USA stabilized.

Sighing tiredly, Jack puttered around the back of his truck to verify all the basic clothing and winter gear for several weeks, survival & camping gear, guns & ammo, a spare bag of tech assembled by Riley in case hers was destroyed or lost, etc... After closing the back hatch, he checked on the two large thermoplastic fuel canisters attached on the rollover bars that protected the rear door from impacts. Both cans were still full so they wouldn't have to stop anywhere on the road. MacGyver had created the automated refueling system just after Patricia Thornton had betrayed them and having a plan for active escape from LA became a priority. A small pump between the protected tanks would pull liquid fuel from the two canisters and send it to the vehicle's regular fuel tank under the chassis. That tank had been modified and reinforced as well during the full-truck upgrades, but it still wasn't a humvee or MRAP truck by any stretch of the imagination.
Not seeing anything wrong or missing from their kit, the ex Delta-Forces soldier walked around the garage towards the wall away from the house to look at the masonry wall that housed yet another small wood burning fireplace as back-up light and heat in case of outages. Looking over the way the cast iron inset was built into the masonry, Jack couldn't help but think the person who designed this house had lived in much colder climates than South California to put so many damned fire pots all over the place. Weren't they afraid of burning down the place, at some point? Not to mention all that wood had to be gotten somewhere. There wasn't a wood splitter or portable saw mill anywhere in sight, so they must get their wood already cut & split from a timber yard.

Mulling inane things idly as he walked back to the main house with his hands in his pockets, Jack was happy to see Diane come into the garage carrying a large thermal carafe full of coffee for their trip. Smiling kindly at the man she had loved once, thirteen years ago, the mature woman walked with a grace and balance that belied her age and the hard life she had lived.

"Hey there, cowboy!" she called out playfully, "I hear tell somebody's going on the trails without having a proper send-off. Now, that just won't do! So here; fence post syrup, extra black, no nothing in it but more black." she handed the carafe over to her friend then made a shooing motion with her hands to send him away. "Alright, alright! You've had your send-off, so don't get mushy mister, and leave before we both say stuff we'll regret not saying ages back."

Jack ignored her request, setting the metal carafe on the hood of his dark blue SUV besides them so he could wrap Diane in a long caring hug, letting his simple gesture speak for him everything that really should have been told over a decade back. Both of them had suspiciously wet eyes when they pulled apart but said nothing more as Deeks came in with Bozer to add more survival gear and a tech bag to the truck that the two NCIS agent would drive to the airport.

With six people moving all at once, the sheer amount of clothing, necessities, survival gear and weaponry meant that they could not simply pile up in the largest truck; that would mean a choice between passengers and the needed stuff. And using a trailer behind the SUV wasn't an option either, since exposing materials to public view was just telling people to come steal from them. Also, with the high chance of being attacked on the road, it was necessary to have two motorized vehicles to be able to escape the situation if one car was shot-out since no outside help would be coming to their rescue.

Not paying attention to the two older adults at the front, Marty and Wilt juggled their boxes and bags directly to the SUV's tail gate to dump everything inside and do a quick reorganization of the truck's contents so things were packed in a stable way to avoid shifting and spilling during the road. After completing the packing chore, they went back inside the house to meet everybody in the dining room for the final gear-up.

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It was barely passed 05:00am when the garage doors swiveled up to let out the two heavy cars for their fatidic trip down to Orange County and an uncertain situation at JWA. The sit-rep they got from the marines on site indicated they had re-taken the airfield and control buildings without a single shot being fired. However, they had found two more portable hack modules in place, hijacking the air traffic control systems and keeping the airfield surveillance protocols under the commands of enemies.

Somebody certainly wanted to keep the entire thing secret for now. Normally, terrorists and supremacy groups wanted as much public fear and submission as they could get so they broadcast their actions and results to all winds. This silent approach to destabilizing the entire LA county aerial management was a novelty, and not a welcome one. It meant there was somebody out there with
different goals and playbook than everyday normal criminals was in the game. This level of resources, efficiency, and truly silent, cloaked operations could only be a foreign government getting their hands bloody in America's private mess.

The choices for such a situation weren't good; Trump's primitive schoolyard bully style had created many enemies who would want to destroy the country, while others just wanted them taken down a handful of pegs from their damned 'american exceptionalism' religion-based idiocy that had been creeping through the government for four decades now. On top of the traditional problems with Russia, China, and the new Montagnard Federation due to their communism, plus the islamic fanaticism of Iran, Somalia, Yemen and many others now integrated into the Pan-African Confederation, many in Canada and Europe had gotten sick of US bullying on the planetary scene. This attempt to sabotage the airspace management around LA could have come from frankly anywhere, with the lead suspects numbering in the dozen already. This was not a situation that would be getting any better anytime soon.

Regardless of the subjacent problems inferred by the ongoing mess, the two SUV's rolled quickly at just over 60 miles an hour, even in tight residential streets, not giving anyone a good chance to see their contents or have a clear shot as they passed by. They shared a comms frequency so that the signal repeaters in the trucks could link the earbuds each person wore to speak and hear the entire group easily. Given how dangerous the day was going to be, all had dressed in dark kit; cargo pants, multi-pocketed button shirt, heavy combat boots and flack jacket with knives, pistols, extra mags and a walkie-talkie with their long-guns in hand's reach near each person. This cumbersome equipment wasn't the usual for Riley or Bozer, and even MacGyver was having trouble getting accustomed again to wearing body armor and guns the way he had back in his EOD field days.

Given their street-to-street combat experience and greater practice with close-in weaponry, Kensi was driving with Marty in the first truck so they could get out to examine problems if they had to stop for any reason that could crop up along the way. Jack was driving the second truck with Mac at his right, Riley and Bozer as passengers behind them, with Angus and Wilt as designated backup soldiers in case they had to get out to intervene. This was the best configuration to survive hostile encounters, especially if somebody planted IED's along the road to stop their convoy for a quick grab & snatch at their gear.

They were lucky so far.

Not like many of the decayed corpses they saw, rotting away slowly in the early rays of dawn, marred by the fangs and claws of the wild dogs, cats, rats and raccoons that eke out a meager subsistence from scrounging trash cans or tearing out garbage bags left outside over night. For animals, rancid leftover steak or rotten human carcass was edible meat all the same.

Riley closed her watery brown eyes as she came to realize that the streets of her hometown looked like a scene out of an apocalypse film or some video game in the 'Duke Nukem' style of shoot everything and never ask questions about anybody for anything. In fact, the semi-abandoned, slightly damaged appearance of the buildings and cars with an occasional corpse reminded her of scenes from the TV series 'The walking dead' since they also had mostly intact edifices but no detectable human presence.

"Great!" the young female hacker thought morosely as they crossed the halfway point of their trip. "That's all we need right now; a damned disease or chemical that turns everybody into zombies so we can have a cheesy scenario like 'Aryan Ku-Klux-Klan undead troopers from Carolina' or some such shite." she silently hoped some moronic biologist hadn't left his freezer unlocked as her musings turned less funny when she considered the possible mutations a toxic poison could do. Looking over at the tense black male on her left, she shook her head negatively, deciding to keep her gallows
humor for later, once they were aboard the plane. Maybe then the team would be able to unwind enough that she could crack an off-color joke without getting kicked out of the moving vehicle with an order to walk the rest of the way.

"Want some coffee, Jack? You guys?" Asked Angus as he took the carafe to serve himself a small cup, mostly to do something with the unused nervous energy roiling inside of him that came out as ticks and trembling in his hands.

Jack shook his head, answering "Nahn, I'm good. I had me a cup while Riley was in the shower since she had to wash-up first to be on the horn with the two HQ's."

"I'll have me some" Bozer spoke wearily as he gazed out the side window. "I was too nervous after wake-up to eat anything but some buttered soda crackers to sponge off the acid in my gut. Now though, I could use some warm joe in me." Turning forward to look at the two men in front, he commented "I was sure glad to hear that Matty pulled out okay, during the check-up this morning. Other agencies weren't that lucky with their bosses and colleagues."

Keeping a steady gaze on the road ahead, Dalton replied to that "Aren't we all! We lost enough people to madmen like Murdoch and his merry hirelings or the damned 'Organization' and its moles. If we lost somebody as high as Mathilda... I don't rightly know how Phoenix would survive that. Not today, not with the country the stinking mess it's become."

As he passed a pair of warm steaming mugs over to Wilt and Riley, Angus spoke softly, his worry and despondency audible in his tone. "Yeah, with the States collapsing into civil unrest and anarchy so hard and so fast, I don't think anybody would give us any help or directions, let alone the people in DC. If Matty or others in our group falls, it'll be up to us to insure continuity and find replacements. And I don't have a clue how to do that right now."

Smirking at her friend as she took the hot mug, Riley quipped "You could stand on the sidewalk dressed in tight spandex T-shirt and bike shorts with that dimpled smile of yours. I'm sure you'd have people coming at you in droves to be hired. Especially women. And queers. And old grannies wanting to adopt you like the little lost puppy you look like when you make that sad forlorn face of yours."

Mac's indignant "Hey! I'm not some man-whore to bait people into service like that!" was drowned out by the laughter from the other two men.

His cause certainly wasn't helped when Jack snorted aloud, pointing out "I think we all heard that you didn't say aloud you'd refuse being adopted by an old granny who'd take you home like a stray mutt! Was that an oversight or an admission? Cuz, you know, with them three mature, lively ladies we left over at the Deeks house, I already have me one picked out and I think the two navy cops would like to know if you got eyes on their mamas!"

Giving his three car-share partners a glare, Mac stayed silent as he poured himself some coffee. With this bunch in tight quarters with him for the next 40 minutes or so, he really needed the liquid courage. Some friends they were! Why exactly did he like them, again?

{ SQ } --- { } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; 08:48am
Western America; 05:48am

Just a few minutes past six the two vehicles managed to arrive at the John Wayne Airport. They had to stop at the hastily erected barricade manned by a pair of marines to show their credentials and
flight orders. The soldiers didn't care one whit for who they were, where they were going, or what the ultimate mission objectives were. All they cared was that their ID cards and DXS documents were genuine so they could get moved along into the compound to allow passage for the two oncoming army trucks carrying infantrymen to establish a permanent garrison at the airfield to have a secure landing strip directly in the heart of LA metro area.

Without any elaborate ceremonies to slow them down, the two cars sped their way across the fenced terrain, heading straight for the DXS's private (secret) hangar. They drove along the fronts of the line of commercial structures, manufactures and airplane hangars, the tarmac to their right, until they reached the one bearing the appropriate identifying logo and name for the shell company they were using as cover to move around the planet unimpeded. The huge aircraft doors were ajar just enough to permit the passage of a heavy SUV but not an actual truck or armored vehicle. As they rolled right into the hangar to stop in the parking zone away from the sizable MD-11C refit aircraft, they saw that another dark blue SUV's carrying US National Guard plates and decals was parked and empty.

While the six persons got out of their cars with their rifles or shotguns in hand, their principal pilot, agent Sampson, came out of the plane to greet them. He walked halfway down the rear cargo ramp, waving both arms at them, giving them the agreed set of signals to indicate everything inside was clear and safe to board. Putting a hand to his ear to activate the earbud inside, he commed them. "Forget your bags for a while and get yourselves inside! The moron-in-chief is about to start up another mess in DC! He's got some 'low mass' thingie he wants to put up for the whole planet to see!"

Kensi snarked aloud "Oh, yeah! We were trying to forget about that! Thanks a bundle for reminding us!" - snort! - "Not!"

"Kenz!" Marty mock scolded her lightly as he jogged besides her. "Give the poor guy a chance! It's the first time he's met you! He can't know just how non-religious you are. It's an easy mistake to understand."

"Shush, you!" Kensi replied amused as they moved. "And for the record," she told agent Sampson as she arrived near him on the ramp, "I might be engaged to the big lug, but he doesn't know me that well."

"Oh, the pain! The agony!" Deeks wailed theatrically as he held his heart with both hands in a fake swoon. "Wounded me to the quick, she did! How cruel women are, to us defenseless men!" he laid on thick, causing the four DXS following them to burst out in laughter.

Pilot Sampson shook his head at the bunch of crazies he had just let aboard his plane. The original four were bad enough, but the new ones didn't seem any better. Oh, well... He just flew the plane, he didn't have to live with them.

"The other two agents from NCIS New Orleans have arrived just a quarter hour ago. They barely got their kit situated in their bunks for the trip. They're in the main living area, warming up the giant TV while my copilot is getting some basic breakfast stuff ready. Nothing fancy, just some toasted bread, some pre-cooked bacon slices warming in the oven and a block of cheddar cheese. Plenty of peanut butter and jams for those who want a bit more substance. And coffee! God knows his green Earth wouldn't be livable without the stuff flowing like water from public fountains!"

Kensi replied with feeling "Amen to that! I could use a large mug of warmth that doesn't come with a side-serve of snark right about now" she quipped at her fiancé with a smirk.

Inside the large aircraft, the six arrivals had walked passed the small propane powered forklift and 12
seat medical minibus to enter the actual personnel sector. They filed through the infirmary, bunkie, communal washroom and galley kitchen where they took up the waiting food trays then finally reached the main work/living area. The two NCIS agents from the Gulf Coast were already setting up the case files and mission briefs on the low coffee table between the large 5-seat couches while the flex-screen giant TV had been unfurled from the ceiling so everybody could see what new depravity the morons in Washington DC had come up with during the night.

"Sssshht!" waved off the female of the pair. "We'll do the intros later on, after we get our appetites wrecked by the bozo-in-chief."

The new arrivals agreed quickly, the scent of hot food having given them incentive enough all on its own. All six were rapidly seated with a plate, mug and flatware to fix their meals as the news program began playing the despicable new 'crusade anthem' the Papal Lord Amerikus had chosen to replace the old one to make certain everybody knew just how religious and pure they now were.

Eghellum; Americana Aquila Imperis

(Imperial March – Star Wars)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 09:00am
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 06:00am
White House; Rose Garden
Washington DC, Maryland, USA

It was a dreary whitish-gray sky, charged with alternating sleet and snow that hung over the Washington DC area this day, unloading its nasty cocktail of mixed precipitations down unto the helpless population below. This nor'easter storm had been climbing up the eastern seaboard for three days already, and it was now centered on the nation's capital at least for the next 24 hours. Not that it would stop the happening of further calamities and depravities in this town; no it would not.

Said helpless population was walking around in the damned slush, already inches deep, huddled in their winter coats, scarves and hats to ward off the bitter cold, or drove around slowly with their doors locked and windows rolled all the way up to avoid being begged or carjacked when stalled in the gridlocked traffic since the police would not be able to come in time to help. DC was moving on the handbrakes this morning; the innumerable police, FBI and national guard road stations had everyone outside acting fearfully about what could happen to them at the next step, whilst the people that stayed home were glued to their Internex monitors to see what would happen now, in following with the depraved announcements from last evening.

As the early morning news reported the violent clashes of the precedent day and night, showing clearly that the country was quickly descending into uncontrolled chaos, the diverse news outlets also began warning the population of the country that another 'mandatory' public address by the White House was imminent. The Papal Lord Amerikus wanted to conduct Low Mass from the Rose Garden to offer what he bombastically called 'uplifting moral guidance' unto the ecclesiastes, soldiers and worshipers of the American Christian Cult.

Fox News had been granted special 'privileged' access to the White House grounds all through the night to witness the massive, ingenious transformations going on. The network was gormless enough to show the poor unwitting populace, right on the breakfast hour when kids were eating and watching TV with their parents, the rows upon rows of severed heads mounted to the fences and
wooden rakes that now ornated the seat of governance for the country.

The elderly news anchor was someone brand new that had never been seen before anywhere in media; he had wrinkled disease-pocked off-white skin with a long bushy beard that disappeared under the table he was sitting at and a long braid of hair, both gray so pale it looked white. He was dressed in arachically styled white cotton and leather clothing, with small wooden replicas of the Flagged Crucifer and lit lampions on both sides of the news desk.

As the flying drone's camera showed the ice encrusted decomposing heads, the geriatric crone waxed poetic on the final, justly deserved, shameful ends of turncoats, traitors, and relapsed heretics that dared to doubt America's Godly Exceptional Greatness. The announcer then started a commentary on the long line of people dressed in all-white cowled cloaks, trudging through the slushy foot paths around the White House grounds, from the front entry towards the rear and the Rose Garden. The comments spoken by the news anchor about the old men shown in the drone's close-ups were more in line with useless mundane gossip or childishly vengeful schoolyard snipes, not bringing anything new, educational, or constructive, about the identities, careers, or new social stations of these participants in Trump's deluded follies.

Then the images changed perspective dramatically as the drone rose to 300 feet high over the Rose Garden, an outdoor space that had been lauded by photographs and diplomats alike over the last 125 years for its beauty and sobriety. During the cold stormy night, it had been butchered by soldiers wielding chainsaws and skid-steers to effectuate a garish transformation with an obvious purpose.

At this point, nobody could hide from themselves the fact that the Trump administration had been diseased with the insanities of religious delirium for a very long time. The steel columns, concrete statues, embroidered cloth hangings and multiple giant wooden Flagged Crucifers that were arrayed in a 'U' shape to enclose the area would have needed months to design, craft, then transport to DC to be stored somewhere until needed. There was no denying it anymore; they had elected a warped, twisted mind to sit in the Oval office four years ago, and been stupid enough to vote for him again last month.

What had once been an open, luminous outdoor space to host diplomats and medal ceremonies under a clear shining sun had been defaced into a dreary, dark parody of a gothic cathedral without walls. Tall blood-red steel beams and girders had been raised to form a skeletal framework that easily evoked the cruciform floor-plan of christian churches since the year 1,000AD. The vertical steel lattice formed virtual 'walls' with oblong arches as 'roof' overhead. Large, thick, glyph engraved horizontal girders seated atop the main posts kept them all straight while forming the connection support base upon which the ceiling arcs were jointed to the walls. Arced steel frames emulating door frames had been placed at the foot of the cross-shaped building to indicate the public entry just like a real church. A minimalist square tower rose on four quads of stilts, above the crossing between the central nave and the transepts, capped by a flat steel trellis floor. In the space between the vertical steel beams of the outer walls and ceiling ribs, the empty zones had been filled with thick, white, polyester cloth hangings heavily embroidered with highly romanticized scenes of 'glorious' crusades carried out by Templar Knights.

On the main floor of the simile-church's nave were placed four rows of twelve concrete benches, each wide enough for 5 people. These benches were composed of thin cement steles for end-sides and individual backrests, as if someone had used unmarked gravestones to assemble each seat.

At the front of the nave, before the newly replaced doors to the White House, a concrete slab had been installed, kept aloft 7 feet above the ground by concrete pillars that were deeply engraved with
mythical figures of christian angels and saints dating back to before the viking period. Atop this platform were situated the 13 thrones of the new Papal Conclave of Bishops and a large master altar, all made of solid drab gray concrete engraved with effigies of the Flagged Crucifer and the American Imperial Eagle. At the back of the platform were two metal gangways that linked to the first floor balcony of the White House to allow passage directly from the offices to the ritual dais so the Exalted Bishops were not exposed to the crowd as they attended the ceremonies.

The transept left of the altar held a series of empty cages big enough for several large animals, while the right transept held eight steel cabinets that were the toilet/sink cubicles for the worshipers attending. Under the platform bearing the celebrants were four large concrete structures similar in aesthetics to a kitchen tableware buffet; these were the tabernacles for the church, holding all the paraphernalia needed during the diverse rituals and ceremonies they planned to accomplish in the 'sacred' site.

Outside the pseudo-chapel, a steel spiral staircase climbed up the central tower that rose well above the pseudo-roof, giving access to the two levels that had a trellis floor to stand upon. The first level, just inside the arcs of the canvas roof, served as media platform for the few invited news crews to stand without bothering the guests. These were limited to Fox News, the Christian News Network, the Christian Broadcasting Network, the Worthy Network News, the Christian Business Network, the Christian Science Monitor, the Eternal World Television Network, the Orthodox Network, and Trinity Broadcasting Network. The second level was the tower's flat roof, where sat an openly exposed firepot, already alight with blazing coals, and a small brass bell recovered from an american warship sunk during World War II near France.

It was nearing 09:15am when the drone's viewpoint faded to black, then switched to the official fixed cameras inside the cloth-paneled edifice. The viewers got a first look at the uniforms and tools of the newly instituted division of the armed services, the Grand Crusade Army of America, who were stationed inside the fake-church to stand guard over the proceedings. The men were all white skinned and young, above age 25 but younger than 35 years old. They all wore basic BDU’s colored pure opaque white covered by long white polyester cloaks bearing a layer of gray kevlar on the outside as added protection. The BDUs were reinforced by solid kevlar plates and parts painted matte gray to emulate silver with sky-blue details that reminded of medieval half-plate armor. These 'crusaders' had full helmets with acrylic visors that could be closed, chest-plates with pauldrons, segmented gauntlets and visible plates clipped over their boots.

The ensemble was made even more complete by the large rectangular metal & kevlar shield they bore on their left arm and a halberd in the right hand. The pole weapon was composed of an eight foot long metal shaft, covered in kevlar insulation, with a version of the Flagged Crucifer that had all points and edges sharpened to weaponize the icon so it could serve as a real functional ax-head in combat. The 'crusaders' also carried on their thick leather belts a titanium-alloy Damascus pattern copy of a knight's broadsword, a brand new 9mm Colt AGCA-2020, an oak wood truncheon, a barbed leather scourge and an inch thick hemp rope already braided into a hanging noose.

Everything in the appearance was designed to remind of the imagery taught children about aristocratic knights, noble chivalry and pious servitude to the Church from Europe's period of the Christian Crusades and Inquisition. The costumes were clearly meant to signify that these soldiers had an exalted religious ranking on top of their basic military rank & functions. The weapons they carried were not just for pomp and ceremony, but clearly intended to be used in those circumstances of indocile children and women, runaway slaves and violent criminals as described by the Papal Lord last night. This demonstration of organized cruelty shook regular ordinary Americans to the core as they could now see how widespread the precepts, and acceptance, of torture, mutilation and
murder were becoming in their land.

The fake church was slowly filling up with the marchers who had been shown earlier. As they removed their cowled cloaks, it was seen they were all dressed in white cotton and leather clothes, fashioned similarly to what Trump had worn yesterday for his ‘speech’ on TV, showing yet again that this had been under preparation for some time. Many of the persons in attendance were well known to America’s viewing public at large, especially for any who followed political and financial news surrounding the electoral process.

What was surprising though, was the extent of the physical transformation some of these men had undergone in less than 24 hours. And it was only manly-men allowed inside; no women and no male under age 25 were allowed in the ‘sacred’ space that had been hastily erected during the frigid night, nor were any non-white permitted, quite obviously. Only the true and pure faithful worshipers of America’s right to rule in God’s Name had been invited this day. Most who had hair had tried some form of viking braid or, if capillarily challenged, gone for the monastic ‘ tonsure crown’, while many had braided small jewels in what hair or beard they had to show off. Many effigies of the Flagged Crucifer or the American Crusade Flag were clearly visible as cape broaches or belt buckles, and every one had a medallion hanging from their neck representing Eghellum, the American Imperial Eagle.

The geriatric news presenter was now commenting with determined viciousness about the personal failings and character limitations of several attendees of the Low Mass in a manner that reminded vividly of Bill O’Reily's style of destroying an individual's reputation when he had no proven facts to talk about but needed to fill the airtime of a show. It became rapidly evident to watchers that those attacks were targeted specifically at those politicians or businessmen who were rich enough and influential enough to rival Trump's newly exalted status if they gave it a try. After barely five minutes of listening to the profanity and insults lacing the commentary, most watchers could understand this was a verbal whack-job on the names and lives of people the Papal Lord was afraid could manipulate or command the country's financial forces and social groups better than him. In an act of transparent fear and despair, the vain narcissist had ordered the public demeanment of his present 'allies' to try and secure his own feeble grasp on power.

This really bode ill omen for the present allies of the Republican Party, the US government, and for the entire country at large, that the head of state was already embroiled in internal warfare to keep a stranglehold on the tools and influence of the controlling apparatus so immediately after a dramatic regime change. It also gave a clearly obvious signal to all who watched the program that Trump himself was not in any ways assured of his own position and hold on power, a signal that rebels, predators and those loyal to the original American Constitution would jump on promptly.

At 09:23am the new heavily engraved steel armored doors that blocked access to the White House's first story opened to let out the 12 members of the Papal Conclave of Bishops, escorting the Papal Lord Amerikus who was the central chair and 13th member of the group. They walked across the steel gangways at the back of the raised concrete platform, taking their assigned thrones to wait until the appointed hour.

Eastern America; 09:30am
Western America; 06:30am

At exactly 09:30am, the small brass bell mounted atop the skeletal tower rang out the old european medieval 'Call to Prayer' that would now be mandatory for all churches of the nation according to a
yearly calendar & daily schedule devised in DC and imposed throughout the land. The elderly news anchor explained that this sound would now signal the beginning of a mandatory temporary curfew enforced by the police, the Inquisition and the Crusade Army. During this obligated period of religious spectacle, all the people in American lands, even tourists and diplomats, were to be in church, at home, or in a public place with a functional Internex monitor to witness the 'miraculous' events caused by true and pure christian faith in action as it cleansed evil and remedied the 'ills' perpetrated against the Risen God's World. Those in a corporate or governmental workplace at the time would be given mandatory paid time to watch, kneel and pray to Jesus, or else the owner of the business would be accused of 'un-American activities' and 'heresy' and dealt with as such. Likewise, if a worker refused to attend mass and pray with the other employees, he would be arrested and punished too. Soon, an Internex based system would allow to track the assiduity of home-bound persons to make certain they got the religious services like the rest of the population, and that they were tuned in.

The 'tuned in' part was easy enough as all active airwaves and Internex channels in the country had been hijacked by the federal government to broadcast the program live. Even the attempts to link to sites or channels out of the USA had been blocked since all the governmental and telecom routing hubs had been reconfigured to 'push' the Papal Conclave's signal on all the lines that they connected with. This meant that even in countries that didn't want the broadcast or tried to block it, about 50% of the blocking efforts failed spectacularly. Since the CIA's cyber-warfare team was engaged in hacking to pieces all cyber-defenses in other nations to make certain that the entire planet knew about the revival and exaltation of their faith in the Resurrected God of the Cross.

America was now publicly declared a Christian Nation, a People of pure unequaled faith in the one and only true God of the Christian Bible, as was written in the Time of the Romans, the Epoch of Prophecies. Any being or organization that challenged this, or tried to keep it from finally becoming the genuine reality in effect, would be exterminated like the untermensch they were. No exceptions and no pardons were allowed under American Christian Law anymore, as the bleeding heart liberal lefties were finally no longer in power to corrupt the Justice of the Land with their weakness and faithlessness.

As the local population – and planet – were digesting the proclamations of the newsman, PLA Trump rose from his velvet-cushioned cement throne to stand before the main altar, a large book bound in black leather held in the crook of his left arm against his chest. Raising his right arm aloft in the 'roman/Nazi' salute, the religious tyrant gave a wide, vapid, artificial smile at the responding salutes from the seated geriatric manly-men and the much younger soldiers posted along the perimeter of the skeletal church. Taking his book with both hands, he made a great garish display of kissing it repeatedly with obscenely flamboyant flourish before putting it back in the 'preacher's crook' position against his left breast.

"Hallelujah and Amen! Unto you all, men of true and pure faith! I command and decree this to be the first of a long line of dominical addresses by the Papal Conclave of Bishops to help uplift and guide the morale of our dispirited troops, police and judiciary agents all across the Land of The Free! By this first ever public address to display the full force of our faith, creed and rule, may the American Grand Crusade Army know now and forever that the Time of Inquisition is at hand! Amen!"

The elderly tyrant smiled vapidly again as he turned left then right to expose his gleeful visage to the crowd and media cameras on all angles they could see of him. Making a few vague gestures with his free hand, the self-styled pontiff basked in the attention and unfettered adulation of the most powerful manly-men of the country's religious, financial and military elites.

Only a few clear-minded persons thought about how weird it was that none of the newly appointed 'Exalted Bishops' were presented or explained to the viewing public. None of these 12 men had ever
been seen in any elected posting, public governance, public service or even corporate administration. Just who the Hell were they, and what authority did they wield? The Papal Lord immediately concentrated all of the media and popular attention directly on himself while also excluding all the others seated on the dais at his sides. This was extremely weird and unconventional, but who could ask, and what answer would they get?

"I have, as you know, all through the four years of my civil mandate as 'secular' President, tried tirelessly, and far more politely than was ever deserved by them, I tried to make a deal, to make a Grand Divine Peace Deal with the opponents of our faith and the swamp full of leftist euro-commie liberals that pollute Washington DC. Despite all my best efforts, despite my most honest proposals to establish a deal that would raise a logical, pragmatical, wall between US, the true and pure worshipers of Jesus our Risen Christ, and the unbelieving hordes of impure moochers that use the Democrats as a front, well, I was rebuffed and denied. Well, by now, you all know about Mueller and his gang of fakers and fraudsters! During the deal-making, I was rebuffed impolitely and, suffered, suffered so greatly, in full public view at that, a cruel, false, and!, and a dishonest witch hunt by the enemies of our crusade to Make America Great Again. This led me, after a long contemplation, the culmination of a long life of such contemplations, to the conclusion that we must work towards a systematic application of White Christian Regency & Governance unto all our citizens without bothering with the opinions or objections of unbelievers. Since they don't believe in Jesus and they wallow in heresy most base, it's a waste of time and breath anyways! So, I told to myself, just HOW do we govern the true faithful without crushing them under dry old theology that even the most learned ecclesiastes in our cathedrals don't fully grasp because, of course!, they aren't divine so, of course!, they can't pierce THOSE mysteries. It has to be REVEALED! Now, now, the vision granted me in my contemplations was that the best way to bring our People, the Christian People, the old devotees and the newly baptized, into the fold of our Lord of Life is to keep things simple! And, yeah, of course, to keep the heathens out, especially out of our borders! Amen, I said!"

Applause and raucous cheers sounded out from the crowd of depraved old white men as the Papal Lord gave another round of raised-arm salutes and vain smiles to his selected audience. Oh, how he loathed and despised them all, just as much as he envied and lusted after their successes! All of them had their own fortunes and solid, reliable businesses to rely on, not the long list of frauds, lies and proven failures that littered his wake in full view of everybody, causing even the men on the main floor to scorn him and see him as lesser than they, despite his exalted station. And that was the primary reason these men had all been chosen by Trump himself to attend in person; so that he could stand atop his raised dais to lord over them with the cameras and the planet as witnesses to his penultimate elevation above all his detractors. There weren't only democrats and non-whites adorning the fence posts and wooden rakes around the White House this morning. A lot of solid old-blood Republicans and conservatives were present too, if D.J.Trump had known they opposed him and his rule from the November 2016 vote and on.

The people present had all been chosen by himself from a long list of several thousand names that was whittled down to just these 240 participants. Not only were they chosen manually, they also had to accept paying a tithe to the Papal Lord's private coffer in order to be granted the exceptional privilege of being physically present at the White House's Roseanic Chapel. Since the demanded tithe was 1,000,000$ for each man who was a 'blessed devotee' during the Low Mass, you can clearly see that the nave was filled mostly with the financial and corporate elites of the USA, not just the most religious or morally worthy. Even in choosing the men gathered for such a momentous event, D.J.Trump's whorish behavior shone through the thin veneer of cult regalia quite clearly, as did the inhumanity and whorishness of the followers themselves.

"Now, my good People of Jesus, the Chosen, the Exceptional - the Americans! - you all saw yesterday evening a foretaste of what style & substance support the governing of a territory and population under the name and Aegis of our Resurrected God, who came back from hellfire and
brimstone to insure our rise to prominence and exaltation. I spoke, quite eloquently by the way, the media people at Fox News tell me, about the doctors and psychologists who challenge our sanity because we actually 'hear' and 'see' Jesus and his Heavenly Father in our lives as they guide us unto greatness and Salvation. I also spoke of pharmacists and drug peddlers who try to chemically lobotomize our good honest followers with impurities and toxic trash, filling their veins with unholy swill that makes them crazier than the real mentally ill who are born that way. It's easy to call somebody crazy when you scorch their nerves and brains with acids and steroids until they're more rabid than the Green Hulk from the comic strips! We’re not crazies, and isn’t it amazing how those of us who stay away from doctors and their lying ilk have a better health, and more happiness in life, than those who spend time in hospitals? It's because we pray! Like our God of Mercy and Salvation intended for us to do! On our knees! With bent head, in penance, in reflection on our sins and accepting of his Rod of Correction on our backs when we need it! Amen, I said!"

The church exploded in applause again, most of it genuine to the great consternation of those who were watching from far away on TV or the Net. While Trump may have about 50-ish million followers and hard-core supporters, that still left a good 300 million others inside the actual USA borders that most certainly did not believe his crap, and the 7 billion people on the rest of the planet definitely did not agree with him or the cult of fools he led. What the few chosen inside the Roseanic Chapel applauded and cheered on was seen as criminal behavior and unmitigated folly by everybody else. Even among the hard-right followers that had apostrophized Trump from the start, the idea that doctors and pharmacists made you sicker rather than better was seen as a cook-fringe conspiracy, not something to base your national health care planning on. Now, seeing for the first time on planetary TV the real, unfettered monster they had elevated to power, many thousands of Trump's quieter, less fanatic supporters began to revise their opinions and choices, only to realize they were waking up too late.

"As such, to whet your appetites towards the type of Faith, Creed and Law that are the true and only standard in our Blessed Christian Land, I give unto you the reverend father Arnaud Bleddings, Lord Bishop and High Justiciar of DC, in his first officiation of his newly ascended career. Let us all applaud him! His task is dirty and base, but holy and a vital necessity in this great and faithful country of ours! Amen!"

The Papal Lord applauded limp-wristedly along with the small select crowd as a wrinkled, hunched and limping, mutilated old crone of a man hobbled out from under the raised platform to stand in the empty space right at the front of the main altar on the ground level. Behind him came a cohort of crusaders, all dressed and armed like the soldiers along the church's perimeter. The crusaders were manhandling a number of persons into the large cages in the transept left of the dais, neither sparing nor caring for the people they were tormenting. Their orders came from God via the mouth of the Papal Lord; they needed nothing else to 'know' their task was both good and holy.

Trump extolled Bishop Bleddings' virtues as the man guided his troops in their task. "The poor damaged wreck of a man you see before you wasn't born like this. No, he was not! He was leading a simple and gentle life of worshipful communal helpfulness in Falls Church, in Virginia, as a Sunday school tutor when he was most basely accused of harming children. His accusers were themselves the child-aged supposed victims. They had no witnesses to concur! Never were there two good christian men, of good and loyal standing with our Holy Mother the church, to back up these spurious accusations by undisciplined, rebellious boys! And what accusation was it? Well, that he used the blessed and holy Rod of Discipline to reprimand and chastise them on bare buttocks, as is
the faith and creed of our church. The little hellions were spanked - Hallelujah! - most firmly on ripe-red skin until they had bleeding stripes imprinted in their juvenile fleshes, just as they had earned – Amen, I say! - but it was the man of faith who was unlawfully accused, arrested and jailed for these false claims!"

Trump shook his head negatively, raising his black leather bible above himself as a beacon of truth as he harangued the crowd. "And so it was, at the time whence a great blessed man was accused of violence, of criminality, and of touching boys in a sexually perverted manner, that the Law of God should have been invoked to guide the police in their task. But no! They did not! Where were the two men of God as demanded by the Bible? Where were the priests to question and validate the accusers' honesty? Where were the ecclesiastes to sit in judgment of this case as it involved a man of the altar cloth? None of this was done, and the lying children were allowed to preside over the destruction of a good faithful man's life. Their lies were the only proof heard in a foul secular court that was not - and never again will be! - capable or empowered to sit in judgment of churches and priests! Hallelujah!"

Pointing down at the damaged old crone who was now counting the prisoners and ordering them on his list, Trump continued his diatribe of lies and hatemongering. "He was cast into Hell's own pit! A civilian jail! A public jail! Not even a private jail, where his needs for spirituality and safety would have been attended. And so, he was caged like an animal, abandoned and forsaken by the heinous secular liberals who gladly swallowed the blatant lies of wayward rebellious boys, all vengeful from having been rightly dis'k'plin'ned by a truly strong man, powerful in his faith in Jesus our Savior. By the false orders of heretics and unbelievers, he was left to the merciless clutches of heathens! The other prisoners ambushed him, beat him, broke his limbs and damaged his genital organs. He was made less than a man in the eyes of secular humanity."

Trump waited a minute to let the crowd boo and jeer at the liberals, progressives and humanists trying to keep them from giving their justly deserved 'roddings' unto boys, especially the colored and diseased ones. And what if they ended up with bruised welts, cut bleeding skin or raised scars? It was called "A lesson they won't ever forget" for a reason, no? How could they remember the strength of arm and faith of their father-confessor decades later if they weren't 'marked' by the corrections he gave them?

"They thought they won! But they didn't! Hallelujah and Amen! For his torture and injury were in fact the holy martyr and blessed branding of Jesus' own will unto his soul and flesh! He was made ugly in the eyes of fools because his impurities were smelted out of him by the relentless pounding of heretics and traitors against God! Hallelujah! That is why the fools and seculars see him as ugly and broken: because he's too pure and perfect for their faithless eyes to countenance without being damaged themselves! Hallelujah and Amen!"

Trump put his book of lies back in the 'preacher's crook' against his chest, taking out a long white handkerchief embroidered with a colored rendering of the Flagged Crucifer to wipe away the sweat of stress, anxiety and exhaustion from his face and neck. The inside of the church wasn't that warm since it was not even close to being sealed, but the media platform projectors and the two large wood burning braziers near the altar created a focused zone of heat right where he stood. This localized warmth was beginning to sap his strength and endurance quite badly since the chill winter wind had chosen the moment of the first 'sanctified' execution to die down. Anyways, he had no choice but to pursue and announce the coming event properly to milk it for all it's glory and influence.

"Well, now that he's been out of prison for two years with healing prayers and emotional support as he should have received all this time, Bishop Bleddings is ready to bless our little community with his teachings and solemn works anew. His posting is tasked with interrogating heretics and traitors, then disposing of them. Now, these aren't simple deaths! Runaway slaves or disobedient wives can
just be shot by the roadside in the back-country cuz they mean nothing to nobody. I mean nobody important to us, the Sons of Jesus, you know that! But these prisoners here, they mean something to a whole lot of people, important people, many who have become elevated, exalted even, amongst our holy brethren of the Flagged Crucifer. As such, these specific anti-American traitors will suffer and die before us, in a truly holy and uplifting display of what it means to undergo Christian Law and Justice in the pure and true nation of America! Hallelujah and Amen!"

The Papal Lord waited a minute as the assembled crowd applauded happily at his declaration.

"And now, for our first condemned traitor of this Low Mass, we present to you a foul and base nigger! A spurious liar and usurper who DARED to occupy the seat of power and authority reserved for a white man in the service of GOD! Behold Leon Vance, the EX director of the NCIS – the Naval Criminal Investigative Services – for the entire US navy, on the entire planet. This man DARED to accuse, investigate and then fabricate lies to convict and jail honest, faithful, white men who refused to recant their faith and suborn themselves to secular humanism and leftist liberal communism! He will right now, before us all, learn the folly and price of his sins against God's chosen sons! And so, I give you the expurgation of Leon Vance, with a glorious Hallelujah and a resplendently powerful Amen!"

The High Justiciar Arnaud Bleddings pointed with a crooked mutilated hand at a mature bald black-skinned man, his broken fingers bending just enough for the crusaders to understand his meaning. They opened the cage and grabbed the indicated prisoner by his shackles, roughing him up as they dragged him bodily to the middle space and the waiting ecclesiaste. Two other crusaders brought from the cement tabernacles a pair of steel poles they slotted into holes in the steel slab flooring underfoot then stood up the prisoner to chain his arms above his head, one wrist to each 8 foot tall pole. At a head nod from the reverend father, the crusader on the right hand took out a curved skinning knife that he used to shred the man's thin cotton clothing, slowly stripping him naked in front of the loudly jeering, appreciative audience.

"Lo and Behold, ye faithful assembled in here nave of the creed!" bellowed the High Justiciar, his weak sickly voice amplified by the microphones in his collar and shouted out through hidden loudspeakers all around.

"I call unto thee to cast aspersions of shame and vitriol upon this cur spawned by a biiiitch! He hath dared to take in vain the Name and Power of our Lord Jesus the Truly Christian, American Christ by claiming he had the standing of a real and full person amongst men of true and pure faith! This nigger had the gall to compare himself to, and declare himself, of social class equal to a white believer of the Redemptor, our God! No, I say! No, he is not, and never will be!"

After letting the crowd hiss and jeer for a minute, the maimed priest continued; "This progeny of undesirable animals, the negroes, then had the unmitigated brass balls to pretend that he had the right to sit in judgment of us, the Men of Christ, in our Almighty! He, a fell spawn of Satan's lowest crassest loins, DARED to take on a job in our great nation's capital that implies police powers and the right to decide who gets taken to court or put in jail! Can you believe that? A dumb coon-dropping of a nigger having the right to judge and sentence US, the true, the pure, the Americans under Jesus our God, the Truly Christian American Christ! How dare he? How dare he, I asked? He dared because before today the true and original Christian Law of our country had been ignored and reviled. Well, no more!"

The geriatric ecclesiaste approached his prisoner so the microphones clipped around the collar of his robes of office could pick up his answer for the crowd to hear. "Tell me now, Leon Vance, you miserable piece of sub-human detritus! How does it feel to be the one judged by those who are Worthy in the eye of God, you fell unclean negro?"
The black man looked his tormentor straight in the eye as he replied "I have yet to see anybody in this fake look-alike getup that is truly 'worthy' of anything but contempt and prison time. You're not christians, not anymore than Barrack Obama was ever muslim. You're just a bunch of defective geriatric old have-been who can't handle the fact the universe has evolved and passed by without needing your opinion, or your presence, to do so! The entire planet has already marched on far beyond the kind of primitive, racist, sectarian social model you want to bring back. Newsflash, morons! This way of running society was abandoned by the modern countries because it destroys the people inside of it, never helping anybody. The populist tyrants that serve as leadership always end up drowning in paranoia, eventually dying by the hands of their own scared and angry people, no matter what they try! You can't hope that what is a tyranny for the lower classes will be anything else than tyranny for you at the top! You can't have a creature with two different natures inside of it! But don't take my word for it! Go ahead, make your little cultist power grab; it'll render you mad and kill you all off quickly enough that maybe the job will get done for good this time around!"

High Justiciar Bleddings couldn't be happier for his first ever public execution of a nigger and sub-human; the man was eloquent, verbose and vitriolic enough to rile up the crowd all by himself. He was a natural at it! If only this wasn't his last day on Earth as decreed by God, the old priest could have made publicly tormenting him by small increments a recurring opening act to the symbolic Weekly Cleansing that had been ordered by the Papal Lord. Oh well; 'it' was just a nigger after all. Nothing important in the grand scheme of Jesus' Great Plan for America.

Raising both feeble maimed arms as high as they could go, the High Justiciar of DC claimed "And so you heard it from the foul beast's own maw! The very reason for his culling from the Realm of God; his innate inability to see and accept the natural superiority of White Men above all else in Creation as was designed and ordered by the most intelligent and powerful entity in the entirety of said Creation and Beyond, Jesus our Christ, the Lord Redeemer, in His Almighty! As such and for them low crimes he hath wrought, for such a nigger cannot do but things that are low, the American Inquisition hereby condemns this whore spawned worm to die like the runaway, rebellious, badge-usurping slave and anti-christian rabble-rouser that he is!"

Gesticulating theatrically at the two young burly men that stood on each side of the chained naked man, the old priest clamored aloud "Soldiers of God's Crusade! I command thee! By the Order of On High; give him the death of a slave that knows not its place in the Realm of God! Amen!"

The two crusaders each took a barbed scourge whip in their right hand and a wooden truncheon in their left then took a good ten minutes at beating the former director of NCIS for the entire country until he was near to passing out from the cruel injuries inflicted. Just before he became unconscious, the foul priest signaled for them to stop and prepare the next phase. One crusader injected the older man in the neck with a spring-loaded syringe; an adrenaline/steroid/endorphin compound to keep him awake and aware so he could suffer the fullness of his chastisement. There wasn't any ways a dumb mule-born nigger was gonna escape from the sentence pronounced by God, no there wasn't!

When Leon Vance was fully awake and cognizant again, the priest signaled a soldier to come forth; the man bent at the waist and used the same curved skinning knife he had stripped his clothing with to cut off his genitals, emasculating him beyond any healing. The young soldier then used a spray can to apply a layer of opaque blue latex to the injured area to seal it so the prisoner wouldn't bleed to death before he was due to die. Following his cruelty with an act of base violence and lack of care for human decency, the soldier then shoved the entire 'apparatus' he had removed up the dying man's anus forcefully, raping him violently enough with his closed fist to cause traumatic bleeding tears that needed a layer of spray seal as well.

The second soldier poised his skinning knife next to Vance's left eye, waiting for the signal from his priest to proceed.
Arms partially aloft again, the High Justiciar exclaimed, frothing rabidly at the mouth just as he was orgasmically throbbing under his robes of office at the sight of his hated nemesis - secular police - brought low; "You DARED to claim you could SEE the faults and crimes of people! You DARED to claim that you had the right to OBSERVE, to peer into the lives and businesses of the true decent peoples of God! Well, you won't lie about that anymore! You won't see anything anymore! You won't hear the lies and vicious rumors of the unworthy anymore, to peddle them like Pure Truth as if you had the right to even know WHAT such a blessed thing is anyways!"

At an imperious gesture from the wrinkled, mutilated old crone, the two crusaders quickly cut across the eyes and removed the ears of the writhing, screaming man. One soldier took a pair of pliers from his back pocket to shove into Vance's mouth to grab his tongue to pull it out at full extension while his compatriot used his curved knife for a single harsh downward slice that amputated the organ in one fell swoop without hesitation. The two crusaders now needed both arms to hold in place the madly thrashing prisoner who had been rendered completely insane by the pain of the injuries conjoined to the drugs he had been injected to stay awake.

The crowd was in a furor.

They wanted it.

They wanted more!

They LOVED it!

And they just supped up the racio-religious diatribe served by the priest between each act of cruel profanation of the flesh that was inflicted on the prisoner. The old ecclesiasate had found just the right dosage of spectacle, pious invocations, cruel justice and torturous punishment to sate the crowd into placid contentment so they could endure the long verbose sermons that would come after. Donald Trump always did like the sound of his own voice, and the people he chose as Bishops were as bad or worse at oration.

Time to close this one up; there was another dozen entr'acte in the cages, that should be enough to tide them through all the necessary pauses during the lengthy Low Mass they would have to endure. Gesturing to the two soldiers with a preordained code, the High Justiciar watched avidly, slowly stroking his stiffened cock through his robes as he 'enjoyed' the show as much as the audience and the Bishops on the dais. The elderly torturer was gratified to behold that almost half the men in the crowd were in states of 'emotion' similar to his own, thus signifying his spectacle had been a resounding success to date.

Time to finish this in beauty!

The two crusaders were back from the cement tabernacles with a large red plastic canister and a lit wooden torch similar to those burning in the steel sconces around the faux-church. The one with the can opened the lid and poured the contents over Leon Vance, starting at his broken feet then slowly going up until the top of his head, and splashing some on his arms too. It was paint. White paint. In an act of utter humiliation towards the man, they had 'white-washed' his body & soul so that God could look on his unworthy soul to judge him without becoming sickened from having to interact with a nigger.

However, the paint's color wasn't the only torture. The paint was made for application on rough uncleaned surfaces like concrete parkways; it was highly corrosive and soon began to eat through the skin and flesh of the chained agonizing man. If it weren't for the drugs in his veins, he would have died, or at least lost consciousness, a long time ago. After five minutes of screaming, the priest signaled the soldier with the torch. The man extended his arm, touching the flaming brand to the
prisoner's lower legs, setting the highly volatile paint ablaze. In barely 5 seconds, the entire body was wreathed in 3 inch thick flames that spewed an incredibly pungent black, brackish smoke into the air.

The unmistakable smell of incinerating meat wafted around the first three rows of pews, making several old men actually lean forward, licking their lips in delight as they stroked their feeble geriatric erections through their thick archaic clothing. Many who had been arrested, judged & jailed, or at least stopped in their depredations, by Leon Vance and his organization in the last decade had been offered prime seats in the audience this morning, and that choice by PLA Trump had just proven to be politically judicious. These criminally depraved bastards would remember who had taken their side and helped them rebuild their names and positions in society, but most importantly, who it was that gave them vengeance against their oppressor. Trump would have several die-hard followers from this point on; several very rich, very powerful followers that would help him convince the rest of the country to follow his tune & beat as well.

After the corpse had stopped moving, it was doused with pressurized CO2 extinguishers and unchained to be taken to the sector of the White House grounds where a specifically constructed trash chipper had been installed. The body would be ground and sprayed over the slushy terrain to fertilize it for a lush green grass this coming spring. It would be the most useful thing the dumb negro would have ever done in his life.

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Eastern America; 10:30am
Western America; 07:30am

President re-elect Donald J. Trump was sitting back, deeply ensconced in his large cement throne, enjoying the comfort of the 3 inch thick blue velvet cushions as he wrapped his long cloak around his tall frame to stay warm enough to endure through the presentation of Leon Vance's death and debasement. Unlike the altar, his seat was in a cold spot that would be the death of him if he weren't covered properly. Why again had he thought that solid concrete was a good material to build the furniture? Because it was outside all year long, through winds, rain and snow. Too bad his aging ass wasn't built from strong stuff like that; it would help to keep his health up a lot more.

There were small monitors at the ends of both armrests but he avoided looking at them, muting the sound as much as he could without looking weak or out-of-sorts to the 12 Lord Bishops that surrounded his throne on each side. Not that there were any chances of these particular manly-men of the cross saying anything against him as their exalted positions depended solely upon his good will and tolerance. But still, there were appearances to be maintained, and he had to look like he enjoyed watching the black man being degraded, butchered and burned alive as much as the audience did.

He really didn't enjoy any of it.

Surprised? You shouldn't be.

D.J.Trump was actually quite the weak-willed coward, and he had no stomach for genuine violence and depravity. From his point of view, the acts carried out by the newly minted American Inquisition and Grand Crusade Army were just the basic necessities of creating a stable reliable level of fear and loathing in the nation so people stopped questioning his health, sanity, electoral legitimacy and the legality of his orders. If the dumb stupid morons had just gone with the flow, he would not have considered seriously going down this road, regardless of how much pressure he got from the evangelicals and right-wing-nuts like John Hagee, Robert Jeffress, Paula White, Steve Bannon or avowed neo-Nazi David Duke. Unfortunately for all parties concerned, the special prosecutor Robert Mueller had come out with damning reports that were heading for a Federal Grand Jury in October 2020, right before he had that 'truly accidental' car mishap that hospitalized him until recently. He
really should have known better than to try to indict the sitting US president, let alone try to implicate
the Ambassador of Russia and goddamned Vladimir Putin on top of everything else.

And so, poor Bob had a car accident that had him hospitalized until two days ago, when the
American Inquisition got him out of his private hospital room at Bethesda, to bring him to the White
House for execution as a heretical anti-American traitor. His head adorned the fence near the main
driveway, right next to Hillary and Bill Clinton in fact, so that everybody got a lesson in common
sense and political survival when they entered the grounds for official visits.

Don't fuck with POWER.

Dear Donald had learned that one quite early in his youth after spending a few years as an almost
bum and juvenile delinquent. That was until his father had laid down the law on his hide with a thick
heavy leather belt then dragged his very sorry and sore ass to a strict, heavy-handed school to make
certain he didn't ruin his life with his misbehavior and a police record.

Thusly, Donald had gone to a military school as a teenager, but never military service for real. Actual
violence had never been his 'thing', especially when it wasn't him dishing it out, no matter how much
he tried to smack-talk and hype-up his own personal brawn, strength and capacity to win any fight he
got into. The several times the instructors at school had demanded he be beaten to break his cocky
attitude and make him pliable to the rules and order of the institution had shown him clearly that he
didn't have the physical endurance or strength to go up against this kind of real strength, so he had
gone to university in admin and finance classes as soon as he could. Business kerfuffles were easy to
paint as great epic battles for the credulous neophytes, and later on for the legions of gullible
sectarian followers who wanted a part of his political ascendancy, but he had never in his life shot
another person or taken a life with his own hands. The very worst fights he ever go in were the
fisticuffs in the schoolyard where he had waved his little jackknife at an adversary's face once, just
before his father had yanked on his chain to reorient his life and attitude.

Ever since that harsh unforgiving school, Donald had had an almost maladive respect (gut wrenching
fear) of military personnel, especially generals since it was always the commandant of the academy
that gave him the beatings he earned. This created a subliminal program in his mind that he could get
close enough to these powerful men to use them, for a short time, but never trust them or beat them in
a fight as he was too weak and too cowardly to do it head on mano-e-mano. Six decades later, he
was so deeply affected by those events of his youth that he could only give the orders and boss the
men around but not actually stand by their side as they accomplished the low works asked of them.
Even now Trump was actively mentally dissociating from the events at the foot of the dais by
childishly telling himself that he just made the lines of text (the laws) but he wasn't the one cutting,
oiling and burning the prisoner so it wasn't his responsibility.

In his diseased mind he was still 'clean handed' compared to the priests and soldiers.

"Honestly" the Papal Lord thought glibly as he looked around the orgasmic crowd through the small
monitors on his throne's armrests, "Could they make more noise? Or make a baser and crasser
spectacle of themselves?" The 74 year old male frowned in upset at seeing so many of the 'manly-
men' of his faith (yeah, right) publicly stroking and wanking their crotch at the sight of a naked man
being tortured. Weren't these all the most stringent apostles of homophobic hate and forcible
conversion therapy for gays? "So much for honesty among the ranks of the church!" the Papal Lord
silently admitted to his own self as he contemplated just how many of these men were actually closet
faggots, perverts and philanderers of the worse sorts. Not that he himself had any fingers to point,
given his long list of female conquests, but at least they were women and willing as the Good Book
commanded.
Although, after hiring Bleddings despite what he knew of the man, Trump could see that his mental griping at the genuineness of the crowd was a bit surfeit. On the other hand, the entire thing was being recorded and would give him wonderful blackmail material for maneuvering these powerful, rich individuals into donating even more 'tithes' to his Lordly Papal Coffer.

Amen for Fools. In their hands his power rested stably.

After almost a half hour, Reverend Father Bleddings had finished with Leon Vance; he gesticulated most obscenely at the smoldering corpse being sprayed with fire extinguishers. As the charred body was taken down from the chains, the church MC used the electronic sound system to pump out a strong, loud rendition of the powerful hymn 'My God is an Awesome God' to rile up further the crowd and viewing public. This also allowed a segue so that Papal Lord Trump could stand from his throne to march at the altar again.

Once more visible next to the great cement table, D.J.Trump raised his right hand aloft, his bible held in the 'preacher's crook' against his left side as usual these days. He contemplated contemptuously the cheering, exalted crowd as they came back down from what could only be described as 'post-coital bliss' and resumed sitting on their bare freezing cement pews placidly for the next phase of the spectacle.

"How depraved you all are..." Trump thought nastily, as he beheld with his own eyes the churchmen who spoke the loudest about Christian Purity turn out to be the worse perverts and amateurs of obscenity in the great land of America. "If Jesus our God does indeed exist, He will not even consider having Mercy or Salvation for your warped souls!" he mentally snorted in raw disdain.

Trump may not be the biggest believer in any divinity, just a good con artist with showmanship to spare in all truth, but he did see clearly the hypocrisy and multi-faced nature of the people who had borne him to the high office of the presidency. For the first time in his life, the biggest liar in the USA considered seriously whether having so many liars, hypocrites, perjurers and oath-breakers in the same country at the same time was a wise thing to tolerate.

He didn't come up with a pleasant answer to that one.

He couldn't even come up with a tolerable lie that would calm his mind about it.

Taking the gold chalice on the altar, Trump sipped some tepid red wine to clear his throat as he needed to take a few minutes to organize his thoughts back to working order. He had a speech prepared that needed delivering right now and all the maudlin thoughts about honesty and the country drowning in the damned swamp-scum wasn't going to help him today. Better keep this for the long lonely nights when he was alone in the Oval Office, gazing into the fire pots as he remembered the better times of his childhood in a simpler, more honest epoch.

Raising his right arm aloft, waving to get the crowd to silence for the following harangue, the Papal Lord Amerikus the First went through the obligatory motions of shouting the many imprecations of racial purity and faithfulness expected at this point. After a few more perfunctory 'Amen!' shouted in response by the crowd, he was able to get the third part of the Low Mass on tracks at last.

"Lo and Behold ye of the faith, Eghellum rises!" he pointed at the white polyester panels set between the tall red steel beams and girders that were in fact flex-screens. The scenes showing epic crusade wars had become all white with only the colored form of the great Imperial Eagle of America flying upwards towards the Heavens. As the crowd shouted its appreciation at the imperialistic neoclassical design of the icon and Team Trump's showmanship, the digital animated bird came back into a dive and stopped in a perspective that filled each flex-screen fully to maximize visibility and detail.
Trump extended both arms sideways to emulate the spread wings of the eagle icon, getting the crowd to cheer even louder as the animated birds all matched his movements and pose. He made a few gestures just to show off, like a puppeteer amusing children with his marionette before getting serious again.

"As you can all see, this is Eghellum, the holy Americana Aquila Imperis! The eagle that represents our great people's divine right of imperial regency over the entire planet Earth, and well beyond in due time! Hallelujah! For now we tell the whole wide world that we have not forgotten the promises made by our ancestors to Jesus as he laid in mortal repose in the sepulcher, in the Epoch of Prophecies! He is Risen! And with his Rise, he has taken us upwards with Him, uplifting us out of Darkness and Perdition unto the shores of Heaven's clouds! Amen! Our forefathers made a promise in Blood and Faith most Holy to our God and Lord Creator Jesus, the Truly Christian Christ, the Savior of America, His Chosen Sons and Servants, that we would spread the Good News: HE is Risen from Gehenna! HE is Reborn from the mortal flesh that decayed in the sepulcher! HE has come back at long last from the blessed clouds of Heaven Most Holy to guide us unto Crusade and the Thousand Year Reign of Godly Peace that was promised in the days of Rome and the Cross! Hallelujah and Amen to you all, sons of America! Your GOD commands and compels this! With clean steel and blazing torches of luminous truth we will surge forth, calling out the Good News of the Rebirth and Coming of Christ to cleanse the Land from its filthy unbelievers! We will remake this Earth as a World of Faith! Hallelujah, I said! Hallelujah!"

The crowd was on its feet, clapping, cheering and shouting for the crusade to start at long last. It was time that the planet know again just how great and mighty America was, when it had the Blessed Hand of its Lord God on its shoulder to guide the men in victorious conquest and burning out heretics.

"Eghellum! Eghellum will guide us!" Trump shouted over the din of the crowd, assisted in this by the church MC who always made certain that the orator's voice was kept louder and clearer than anything else happening inside the building. "I give you my most solemn promise! I do indeed give it! I promise that as a true son of a pure faith in Jesus the Christ, our God and Redeemer, that I will follow unto battle and victory His Holy messenger, the Eagle of Regency, holy Eghellum, the blessed Guide from Heaven that will ferret out the heretics, traitors and conspirators against America's holy greatness, that was commanded by divine might from On High! Hallelujah and Amen! For the Inquisitors and the Crusaders of America's pure faith! A resplendent Hallelujah and soul-rousing Amen!"

Bolstered by this very public commitment to religion, faith, church-power and church-run governance, the highly credulous (and criminalized) crowd was again on its feet, chanting a hymn along with the organ music being pumped out loudly from the hidden loudspeakers. As the old medieval war song ended, the Papal Lord rose his left arm above his head, bearing aloft the bible of their creed to obtain immediate attention and compliance by all present.

"As I have spoken previously, as I have said many times in the past years, and will no doubt say again, we have traitors and heretics hiding in our midst. Not all of them are as easily detected as that foul nigger Leon Vance! He was black as the brimstone from Hell's lava lakes, and yet he sat as a pseudo-judge and prosecutor above white men and church officials! Just how much easier to spot could he be? Answer me that, you who work in law, justice and prisons! Just how was it that such a blatant bastardy was tolerated to exist unchecked up to date? Where we the congressmen when this fell creature was anointed to his undeserved office? Where was the punishment and disavowal for the cretinous fool that dared commit the sin of nominating him in place? Do you have answers for this?"

Waving his right hand violently to cut off protests and excuses, Trump continued his pontifications, unwavering in his purpose. "But that isn't enough! We all know by instincts given us by God
Himself that negroes, yellows, reds and browns don't belong in power, or even in civilized society! Most aren't even fit to use as cattle to pull wagons or pick up the garbage in the streets, so base they are! Some have such defects in their minds that I wouldn't butcher them to feed hogs, for fear that their diseases would transfer to the humans afterwards! But these aren't the real enemies of good, loyal christian devotees. No, they are not! They are aberrant and unnatural, yes they certainly are, but they are not good enough, nor close enough to human in God's holy eye, to warrant being called enemies. Plague of vermin, yes; swarm of rodents, definitely; horrendous beasts, I would agree too! But they are not intelligent enough, and do not have enough genuine human soul inside their diseased rotting husks, to warrant being accepted as enemies of the One True Faith of the One True God."

As murmurs spread around the church, Trump smiled vapidly, pleased with how he got their attention for a good long while again. It would only need to last a few minutes more before the second 'cleansing' was committed so he had to move swiftly to capitalize on the mood before it elapsed.

"No, my good brethren, sons, and nephews under Jesus's own Light of Redemption! The untermensch and other offal of society are not real genuine enemies! These are! Amen, I said!"

As he pointed down at the front of the dais, the Lord Bishop Bleddings was again in motion, guiding his inquisitors and crusaders to place several stout steel poles upright while prisoners were dragged from the cages to be chained in offering to the viewing pleasures of the appreciative audience. Seeing the men and women chained up like meat from the ceiling hooks in a butcher's cold room made several become aroused anew, even before the actual torments began.

"Look at their colors!" shouted Trump from his position by the main altar. "Look at their skins! Look at how these fell traitors have consorted with unbelievers, heathens, heretics, denunciators and renegades that all work in foul manners against the Will of God! Lo and Behold, I said! Feast your eyes on the existence of them that art against the faith, redeeming light and exalted divine greatness of America in its almight!"

Adjusting a tablet-sized swiveling monitor atop the altar, Trump could see which prisoners were chained where and a small description under each person to help remind him of his talking points so he could properly manipulate the heartstrings of the gullible worshipers.

"First we have one of the most insidious things begotten by the coupling of poor and menial knaves; a criminalized 'biker dude' with his long beard, tattoos and piercings, who has spent nigh on seven decades renegading the true and genuine existence of Jesus, our Lord and God! I give you all Billy Gibbons! Now, if you think he looks like a good, honest, hard working Texan man, you would only be partially right. He his Texan, and probably works hard on his crimes and depravities to make so many of them in such short time, but he is most certainly not honest! The proof of his crime is chained right to his left."

Pointing at the second prisoner, a beige-skinned woman in her late thirties, the Papal Lord expounded: "This is the procreate of this back-alley cur and his red-skinned native biiiitch! A mulatto! A pseudo-white who tries daily to pass herself off as a real white human being of social standing amongst us despite that she isn't! I give you the barking she-dog, Angela Montenegro, in all her resplendent crapulence!"
After letting the crowd hiss and jeer for thirty seconds, he moved on to the next in line. "And now we have the proof of the foul conspiracy at work! Not only did the she-animal get a job at the Jeffersonian Museum in their forensics department to influence investigations and arrests of our good, honest, white christian men, she also had the utter gall to defile one and marry him to procreate with him! And so I give you the proof of the calamity in progress across the USA: doctor Jack Hodgins, born from a rich protestant family who denounced his heritage, both in blood and money, to marry this coon-spawn whore so they could pollute our society with more of the same! Which they did!"

Allowing the crowd some leeway as he sipped some more wine to moisten his throat, the Papal Lord was well pleased at the proceedings to date. Everything was going as the planners had predicted, and the absence of doubters or so-called 'defenders of logic and rationality' from the assembly had certainly helped to keep things on their proper tracks today.

Trump dropped a little nugget on the listeners that they hadn't expected. "I have decided, in my almighty and God-given authority, to spare the unlawful procreates from the torments the whorish adults have earned. Thusly, all three little ones were 'euthanized humanely' by having their necks manually broken by one of our noble inquisitors who is trained specifically for this delicate duty. Upon the poor unfortunate souls of children, made impure and base by the unholy acts of their parents, we say Amen."

The audience stayed silent for a minute as they absorbed the words spoken by their leader. The silence was quickly rent asunder by the heart-wrenching sobs and protests of the mulatto woman, who cried and shouted threats and promises of violence against all of white christian America for the crime of murdering her babies. Her biker father swore out in four languages that he would see the Trumpists burn alive, just like they did to Leon Vance and planned to do with them. Jack Hodgins kept silent like a tombstone, his face a frozen mask of disdainful contempt as he gazed straight ahead, never moving or giving the crowd any satisfaction whatsoever.

Trump spoke into the collar of his robes of office for the first time of the Low Mass, giving orders to the inquisitors to gag the woman until it was time to let her scream again. She had the right to vent, he could concede that, but she was taking far too much media attention away from him and his presentation to be tolerated any longer. At least, her cries had made a nice little transition while the crusaders brought the other scum to be 'cleansed'.

Trump continued his harangue has the other two prisoners were chained and stripped naked in their own turns. "And here we have the deplorables! A well matched pair of spurious knaves and depraved bastards who should never have been allowed to exist! The woman is Temperance Brennan, she's a doctor of bones, death, and 'things that kill people' at the Jeffersonian Museum. She, a woman, USURPED the job and function of men by setting herself up as investigator, prosecutor and judge in criminal cases for nigh on 20 years! She who should have been making babies and cookies at home was instead traveling the country, and even out of it, to spread her false knowledge and fake judgments across all of Holy Creation as if she had the right of it! Well, today she will learn that she didn't have the right! Amen to that!"

Trump aimed his ire at the next woman, brown skinned in her late forties. "Here next, we have yet another slave-stock that didn't know her station in life! The self-styled doctor Camille Saroyan who USURPED many, many different jobs, important jobs!, away from good, decent, white christian men during her years! First she was a street cop in New York city, then became coroner for that same city, and finally she managed to finagle her way into the Jeffersonian's team because another nigger was in charge of recruitment, so he let her in for a few 'favors' that we all know what those were... She spent several years, hard at work using the forensic department as the tool of her base works, targeting and destroying any white man that dared rebuff her attempts at stealing power,
influence or moneys from their families."

The Papal Lord made vague limp-wristed gestures with his right hand, making the crowd silence their boos and jeers immediately as he continued to disparage the woman with multiple hypocrisies. "Not content with frauding her way to the top, she has also whored herself with many white men, usually in exchange for power, access and money she did not earn, even when her legs were spread wide open. Her latest and most criminal act though, was to actually 'fall in love', if such a slutty shrew can actually feel such emotion, with none other than some brown import from Iran of all countries! He is besides her, as you can see, and a resplendent Hallelujah to our brave crusaders for his capture!"

Pointing at the brown skinned man in his late thirties, the Lord Amerikus proceeded to destroy his reputation based on lies and bigotry alone. "A muslim! A bloody fucking muslim! Dear men of Jesus, our God and Savior, a murdering muslim is what she copulated with, and tried to procreate with! Repeatedly! Inside our borders! Right inside our capital city, I tell you all! One of those damned sub-human bastards who worship that false god that doesn't exist, that came into America – illegally! – to steal away one of the top paying jobs in the Jeffersonian, and plot terror strikes from within! That is what that purulent bi-iii-ititch laid in the muck with like a sow, trying to climb the ladder to reach her brown masters in their fake heaven that nobody decent believes in! She tried to make herself important by spawning a gaggle of new criminals and terrorists with this base turdcake on legs, and the bleeding-heart lefties let them at it! Well, no more, I say! And Amen! to stopping this damned piece of sinful depravity before it actually produces anything!"

Gesticulating spastically in great agitation as if this case were actually personally offensive for his own person, the Papal Lord pointed the last condemned man with more vitriol than he had shown any other prisoner to date. To convince the crowd, he had to look and act convinced himself, and he was quite good at self-deception, after all these decades of practice.

"Here we come to the worst of the worst; the reason we are all here this day. The incarnation of SIN! The incarnation of HERESY! The kind of sub-human under-being that caused all these here calamities that we pointed and accused before! I give you the ARCH-TRAITOR, Seeley Booth! And you can guess, can't you all, which of them dens of liberal progressive anti-American depravity he was working in, can't you? The FBI, he worked at! Like all those treasonous bastards who led that witch hunt against me for 4 long years! Just like that other bastard, Bob Mueller and his ilk, but, but! Lo and behold, what real genuine truths we uncovered about that gang of criminals in the end! And now we have Seeley Booth... A white man in his late forties, healthier than a draft horse, and virile too, given he spawned several times already..."

Trump made a face of total contempt for the subject of his harangue: "He was one of our best, most honored servicemen; a master sergeant in the US Rangers trained into an elite sniper and tracker! He then even managed to achieve the exalted position of US Special Forces Warrior! Yes, my good brothers and sons of Jesus, he was one of them we deem worthy to enter the ranks of the Crusaders under the Flaged Crucifer! But that was before the accursed FBI put their claws into his soul, dragging him to the dark reaches of the SWAMP that is the kept domain of the DEEP STATE and its minions... And so he was lost to us ever since, becoming instead an enemy of all that is great in America..."

The religious tyrant took out his lengthy colored handkerchief to wipe his sweaty face again then sipped some wine, trying to stop the shakes of anger in his hands. "He was born catholic, yes, but that is clearly acceptable as a first step towards evangelicalism and accepting Jesus, the Risen God, as his personal Savior, as we all did! And a rousing Amen to that! He even gave god a beautiful white baby boy with a decent white woman, that unfortunately, he then divorced... An excusable foible in any man, especially a powerful man with the sorts of powerful, stressful jobs he had done in his life..."
Then he found and married another woman to have two more beautiful white babies with... Unfortunately for him, and for our country, that vile witch of a female was Temperance Brennan and all the baggage of arrogance, anti-God hate and - supposed - scientific glories... What a waste, I tell you! Such beautiful children they were... But they carried the taint of betrayal and fraud their parents had germinated inside them and so the lowest of all duties was done. One of our noble crusaders took the 16 year old and gave him one last bit of honor, due our regards and debts towards his father. The teenager was given a combat knife and a chance to fight against the soldier who wore his crusade armor but no weapons, so that the child could die on his feet like the man he could, should, have become under the Holy Cross of Jesus our Lord. The other two babies were under 5 years of age and innocent, but tainted nonetheless and received the mercy of snapping their necks during drug induced sleep, as the other children did."

Rapping his knuckles on top of the cement altar in a gesture of angry frustration, nearing the point at which he would loose self-control and go out on an actual rant rather than the meticulously orchestrated speech he wanted, the dictator finished his heinous sermon against the last condemned man. "You see before you the TRUE REASON why our country has fallen so low, going so far as to believe that we are not the exalted, elevated, Chosen Sons of Jesus, the God of the Christian Bible, as decreed by his Heavenly Father. You see a white man, born into Christendom's oldest fraternity, who turned his back on it, repeatedly, by allowing fell negroes and rat-like browns to assume positions of power, instead of forbidding it and fighting it as he should. He also allowed several women, many who weren't even Christian, let alone white, to hold offices of power to influence the world. But his most criminal act was his TREASON against the newly enacted Papal Lord Amerikus; he helped thousands of felons, traitors, renegades and rabble-rousing revolutionaries, to foment foul resistance and scheme to overthrow my Just and Enlightened rule in His Holy Name. Seeley Booth plotted right alongside of felons like Leon Vance of NCIS, just as he was told by the directorate of the FBI, and then he tried to stall the march of the crusaders as they stormed through the stinking warrens of swamp rats and marsh hogs that compose the Bureau's higher echelons in DC. It was by his actions that so many managed to reach hidden escape routes by which they evaded capture, and their Righteous Sentences."

Finally finished with his vituperations, the Papal Lord sat back on his concrete throne, wrapped in his long white cloak in such a fashion that only his face was showing, the mien of displeasure and disgust evident for all who saw.

And that wasn't all that was seen by the viewing public.

Since Team Trump had made certain that at least two dozen people arrested and condemned by the Jeffersonian's forensics department were pardoned, then offered a seat in the Roseanic Chapel for the event (if they could afford it), it was understandable that there was a sustained applause and cheers since the Lord Amerikus fell silent. Practically the entire investigative team was to be executed and it was getting better as it went. For these career criminals who had committed multiple kidnappings, torture, rape and murder, seeing the extermination of the only police team in the country that owned the equipment to investigate fully, as well as the competence to capture and convict them, it was like getting a guaranteed free-pass on all future crimes they could commit. Better yet, it was the actual government itself that was giving them this guarantee that they could now 'play' to their heart's content, as long as they supported Trump, his team, his agenda, and paid his exorbitant tithes and missionary crusade support contributions when demanded.

It was now visible to the naked eye of all who saw the show. The government and police who had been given the charge of public trust to protect the weakest citizens of the country had turned around to instead ask the criminals and mafias for 'cover charges' and 'right-to-play' fees in exchange for not looking at their activities, on top of lying to the population by telling them they were still perfectly safe under the new theocratic tyranny. Even just a few hours into the newly instituted regime and
nobody was foolish enough to believe a word they said anymore. The only protection the population would have from crimes or police brutality would come from their own hands, and nobody else's.

That was possibly the only thing the blasted NRA had gotten right in its entire history. Now that their favorite president to date was re-elected, with an even more suspicious cloud of doubt hovering over his entire second campaign, the gun lobby would get to see that they had helped put in power the very tyrant they had been warning the American population against for decades. And they would also see just how much they would need those guns in very short delays, indeed. Being right isn't all its cracked up to be, not when you're this right about so much that it bites you in the ass.

Eastern America; 11:30am
Western America; 08:30am

As there were plenty of prisoners to punish, torture and kill off, Papal Lord Trump had given the order to do them all the same way, in the same period, so that it didn't take more of his precious media exposure than was strictly necessary. The process would be timed and regulated to fit inside his own short, flitting attention span, and severely damaging punishments meted out to the inquisitors and crusaders, including Father Bleddings, if they over-passed their allotted schedule. The tyrannical camera-whore really, REALLY, didn't like it when anything other than himself was on the screen, and absolutely hated when any voice other than his own was the narrative being heard and followed by the crowd. That was why he had so clearly favored a single telecom network up until a few days ago: because he could drop in on a running show and push people aside to monopolize all the attention unto himself at his will, while nobody in the company bitched or called him out on his multiple fallacies.

Somewhat like Nero, in Rome, not that far back...

But it's a more complicated social situation than that.

After 8 years of Obama presidency, Fox had been slowly starving for advertising revenues and visibility in a marketplace saturated by center and left leaning competitors with no possibility to move rightwards without sounding as disjuncted from reality as Breitbart, or the church owned networks that were by definition 'not news, just religion' in the eyes of consumers. Then Trump was elected in 2016, and the entire paradigm underpinning politics, policy-making, diplomacy and news-making was changed for ever across the globe, since wherever America went, the rest followed or dreamed of being there too.

Trump didn't adhere to the truth and had no existing relationship with it.

Fox employees discovered rapidly that the operetta dictator spoke mostly according to his highly unstable feelings, shifting mood swings, and mostly just to hear the sound, tone and feel of his own voice filling the empty space around himself. Then the highest elected official in the land had publicly coined the two phrases that would determine both style & substance of his presidency for the history books: "I have alternative facts that real genuine Americans will know to be the truth" and the self-serving "My detractors are simply repeating 'fake news' that I myself have debunked and refuted many, many times. And it's false – BECAUSE – I have refuted it so often, as you well know my honesty."

With such a man in office, the stockholders in Fox saw a one-shot deal to waylay Breitbart News and take the pole position as the one most watched and believed right-leaning network in the nation for a very simple and cheap cost. They would be Trump's baggage-boys, all the way for as long as he was elected, and far after that if the media longevity of past presidents was anything to judge by.
For outsiders, especially the so-called 'experts' in journalism and corporate ethics, this was an unconscionable sacrifice of their dignity, integrity, and reputation as individuals worthy of trust and belief. But that was not true, and simply a myopic perspective on a far more complex problem. CNN led the left-of-center pack for decades and showed no signs of changing, no matter how much place they had begun granting to religion and faith subjects in their reports and variety shows. That wouldn't last long anyways since every such report cost them dearly in number of viewers who left them due to perceived 'pro-cult' shift and commensurate number of advertisers threatening to leave soon after. By comparison, Fox had already cornered the market for the right-of-center 'ordinary faithful' auditors, therefore going an extra mile to reach those evangelicals closer to the white-power movement wouldn't actually hurt them at all since their clientele could hardly move to another broadcaster unless they went to what were considered 'fringe' and 'right-wingnut' networks.

So Fox News did what any company faced with slowing sales, dropping viewership and credibility issues would have done: follow the money to survive. This was especially doable since the realistic cost of the move was less than 1% of what the general population outside their acquired market would perceive it to be. The move proved fruitful for Fox that saw its position in the viewership ratings go up dramatically, reaping 'soft core' and 'non-fanatic worshiper' auditors that had been flittering near the right-fringe without ever diving deeply. Add to them also several tens of thousands who were slowly being convinced by the DEEP STATE conspiracy theories, or just disgusted by anti-police & antifa stories that kept coming out every other week, and you see easily why the network owners took the decisions they had. The results were probant enough to be recognized, even by competitors who had to publicly admit the strategy worked as planned. Fox became the household reference for everything related to Trump himself, so much so that sometimes they got information before the Cabinet and White House staff could produce the formal legal writs for dissemination to the officials responsible for applying the policies.

Fox News, and its mother network as a whole, lived financially well off the sociopolitical context during those few short years, despite all the reputation hits they admittedly took. Until today.

Now there were dozens of right-wing leaning, white-power promoting, and christian church operated networks at the most important meeting of the century since the end of World War II was announced. Fox's quasi-exclusivity was broken and its mediatic primacy rubbed, never to happen again in the lives of the current stockholders. Mostly because quite a few had begun publicly expressing doubts about Team Trump's electoral and judicial viability this passed cycle, given that Robert Mueller was about to lay down a slew of indictments against him and several close relatives.

Just before his untimely car accident with his entire family, that was.

These fretful stockholders, supposedly dear personal friends of Trump as they owned part of Fox and had supported conservative causes for multiple decades, including his bid for election in 2016 & 20, now had their heads lining the main half-circle driveway in front of the White House, not far from the entire Clinton family, Mueller, Pelosi, Flake, McCabe, Comey, Ryan, Romney and hundreds of others. It's an openly admitted fact that if poor late senator John McCain had lived passed the year 2018, his head would be on those fence points too. As it was, his daughter and her family were present in his stead; be it certain their ends had not been humane.

That was also WHY there were so many telecoms invited to the event instead of just Fox; because the man in charge had learned his lesson that nobody, even his cherished corporate pet, would ever stay loyal and compliant for ever. He'd better have several alternatives in reserve for the inevitable moment when the darling of the day would turn on him to demand treasonous depravities like honesty, integrity, dignity, stability and reliability. You know, like was expected from any adult member of society...
Supposedly...

But not for Trump, not since he lived inside an 'alternately factualized' reality of his own belief.

Surely 'adulting' wasn't a requirement for him... Was it?

And so the secondary executions of the Low Mass took place in a record 15 minutes flat, chronometer in hand, to make certain that nobody stole from the Papal Lord any of the precious time that God had given him to address the Faithful, the Nation and the Rest. To take such 'holy time' from him was not only a crime and a treason against his exalted person, it was also a heresy against Jesus's Great Plan for America, and punishable as such by decree of the Papal cabinet.

So sayeth God... Apparently.

Well, the Catholic Inquisition had worked like that for close to seven centuries before being pushed aside by secular parliaments and depraved monarchs more interested by cousin-incest, inbreeding, producing chinless asylum tenants, debauchery, gambling away their kingdoms on ponies or baccarat, and dying from syphilis contracted from aforementioned internecine debauchery.

And people thought American democracy was an uncontrolled, ugly affair?

Anyways; the slave-spawns were dead, the traitors were dead, the crowds were orgasmic again (and again; Yeeewww! Really people? Aren't you homophobic prudes?) and the children were actually alive in a drugged sleep, in a private cargo plane dedicated to live cattle transport, on its way to Siberia via pit-stop in Alaska, to be sold into sexual slavery to a Bratva division that good friends from Moscow had put him in relation with, a few years back. You know; back, like, in the period that Mueller was investigating but wouldn't tell about, back. What? Running a dictatorship took money, even a religious one. His lavish Papal lifestyle had to be richer and more pompous than everybody else or he'd lose face in public. As for lying to the parents and crowds about executing the kids humanely being a lie... Well, it was just more 'alternative facts' for the cameras, and it sounded soooo good, and holy, and pious, and benevolent, and just the sorts of thing that an enlightened tyrant would do... that it just slipped out on its own.

He'd waffle on it, or walk-it back at some point.

Or maybe not.

It's not like anybody would call him out on his lies and fabulations anymore, was it?

Most people had a small thing called survival instincts. The exceptions would ornate the fence.

The Old Texts said it best; each coin in your purse is a direct proof of how much God loves and approves of you, your relation to His creed, and the way you support His church. That was 'Christian Truth' for 2,000 years.

Or, to put it in language the idiots walking the streets could understand: it was all about 'the economy', just like the conservatives had been trying to tell people for decades already. Money made factories, jobs, consumption, luxury, therefore everything was made by, or bought with, money, or its natural equivalent like precious metals, gems or artworks.

If you had the money, you made the rules or broke them as you went. And ever since the SCOTUS had made that slew of laughably inept decisions that gave companies / churches rights of political speech & spending equal or above those of living humans, it really was about money and nothing else. Not even Divine Grace could save you, if your accuser had the cash to pay more mercenaries to mount a physical attack than the county had cops to protect you. And cops were so badly paid that
renting them out away from their oaths was easy.

Well, it should be easy. Mueller's team was a nasty exception to a well practiced rule.

Although, the foolish man knew better now.

The Papal Lord was letting his mind drift on these many loosely related thoughts of media, economy and social movements, deeply ensconced in his cement throne's blue cushions, glancing over the forms of the pedophiles, closeted faggots and torture-porn adepts that so obviously composed the richer upper-tier of his voting block, when he saw something that gave him pause.

Deep inside the eighth row of pews, on the left, an elderly man who bore the symbols of a KKK affiliated sect over his mandatory all-white 'Knight of Christ' traditional clothing wasn't looking at the depraved spectacle up front, but at the glowing screen of his smartphone. Wasn't that amusing? An old guy who probably had been raised in a barn with farm animals, and used a chamber pot for most of his first two decades of life because his family couldn't even build an outhouse, was fiddling with the most modern tech the planet could offer. My, how the times had changed from the simplicity of their youth, in the Blessed 60's. Weirdly, the old crone held the device with both hands just in front of his nose, at an angle that showed he was reading text on it, not taking illegal pictures of the holy inquisition & cleansing in progress. If he wanted keepsakes photos or film, he could purchase it from the TV networks who would then pay a cut to the Papal Lord in order to maintain the new Grand Crusade Army (and Papal lifestyle).

Trump frowned (pouted like a baby) as the 90-something years old began to wail and cry, madly spouting gibberish as he suddenly rocked back and forth in his pew with spittle drooling down his chin like one of the broken, insane and irrecoverable souls housed inside his decrepit asylum, which he had led for well over five decades. The old priest's neighbors spoke to him, trying to calm him, then looked at the man's phone screen as they talked among themselves. After a couple of minutes, they began to touch, grab and pull at the other neighbors in the pews in front or in back of them, trying to bring their attention to whatever the Hells was going on with that useless decrepit old crone's bloody phone.

Trump was re-wrapping himself in his long thick cloak in an impatient, flourished gesture, when he saw that the other men surrounding the old alienist had taken out their own phones. Many were now busy typing away at their screens, completely oblivious to the performances of the suffering prisoners as their lives were being ended by oil and flames. In fact, the row of flailing screeching condemned was so long and numerous that it belched up a temporary curtain of brackish dark gray smoke that hid the crowd from Trump's view for a few minutes, before CO2 extinguishers were whelmed to douse out the fires and the rushing winds cleared the air inside the pseudo-church. By now, as the crusaders were taking the dead prisoners' corpses down from their poles for disposal, there were several dozen other old men panicking in the pews, shouts echoing all around the Roseanic Chapel's interior, and it had nothing to do with the punishments suffered by the traitors.

Standing up speedily with anger at the disruption of his well orchestrated show, and most upset that it wasn't a wave of applause and contentment towards his Papal Persona that was the reason for this ruckus, D.J. Trump stomped in furor, displaying a childish tantrum for all to see. Once abreast of the main altar, he tapped the microphones in the collar of his robes of office, telling the church MC to put him on the speakers, and crank the volume to 250db so he could bury all the noise under his voice.

"All right! All right! I'm here!" he told the assembled men in a whining, fake-caring tone, as if he were trying to placate a class of rowdy preschoolers angry they had been denied candy before lunch. "I'm here, you can all see me! All you have to do is look ahead and up, and SEE ME!" he shouted louder, trying to overrun the din of discontent and anger sweeping through the crowd of followers.
One of the stouter middle-aged men stepped out of his assigned (rented) pew and stalked all the way to the front of the nave, shaking his smartphone violently at the Papal Conclave sitting on the raised dais as he marched. Once near Father Bleddings, he grabbed the deformed, crooked old lecher by the robes to shout into the ring of microphones surrounding the man's neck, so he could be heard by the entire assembly, as he accused their new Lord Amerikus and his minions.

"You miserable bastard!" the 55 year old shouted, aspersing Bleddings with spittle as he pointed violently with his right index finger at the older men on the dais. "You thieving backstabber! That was your plan all along, wan't it? Get us here on a Sunday morning, in freezing storm winds and snow drifts, to get ensnared by your debauched pornographic torturing of naked people while your damned minions ripped the money out of our churches! You vile apostle of the Snake of Eden! You kneel at the altar of Judas Iscariot, traitor! There's a special place in Hell for you and your kind! Do you hear me, Trump? Nobody steals from the holy seat of Jehovah's Realm and gets away with it! Nobody!"

Completely baffled by the sudden accusations as he hadn't had any such plans in progress (at the moment) the Papal Lord gesticulated in a way he thought made him look imperative and authoritative. In fact, it made him look like a weather vane spinning in a storm, not like an important man signaling for attention during a meeting. But then again, by the time he realized he'd made a PR blunder with his unscripted maneuver, it would be the least of all his problems. Making more gestures at the diverse soldiers around the nave, he had them grab and re-seat the old religious fools back in their cement slabs by force, and even by threat of the Rod of Dis'k'plinn as if they were just unruly boys in class.

Once all the worshipers were back in their assigned seats, an inquisitor walked out, carrying a long white aluminum replica of the Flagged Crucifer that had a miniature news studio caliber microphone & camera system mounted on the head portion of the cruciform pole. Walking slowly at ceremonial pace, the young soldier pompously presented the recording set at the rabid follower who had just spoken accusations against the Papal Lord and his Conclave, so that everybody could hear him dig his own grave by himself, just before the Lord Amerikus condemned him to a traitor's death like the others.

Staying seated as instructed, the middle-aged priest who was the topmost leader from the Jehovah's Witnesses organization on US soil, grabbed the end of the ritualistic pole and spat his venom at the recording device without any reservations. "You stole from us Trump! You stole from our church! While you kept us all busy with traveling in the deep night to reach this damnable circus show, your army was raping our servers and our banks, seizing our money, our permits and our land ownership titles. Everything we had earned or been entrusted with by the Name of Christ got swindled! By your people! The attacks came from the servers of the FBI, NSA, CIA, dozens of US military bases across the nation and dozens of federally managed research centers like the old Area 51 control bunkers and the Los Alamos nuclear prototyping & testing laboratories. There were even hacks coming straight form the blasted White House cybernetic security team and every Trump hotel, office building or manufacture! Even from those you own overseas! What the fuck are you playing at, mongrel traitor?"

Now, Donald J. Trump was a con artist, a rip-off expert, a whorish he-slut and an attention addict of the most maladive sorts, but he had never even thought to do something like this. Sure, he had thought to tell a few of the richest churches that their permits to own a house of worship could face 'renewal difficulties' at the municipal level if he weren't properly 'satisfied' of their obedience to Christian Creed by a steady flow of tithes, tributes and personal gifts directly to his own person. But to completely destroy an entire faith-based organization when it could still pay and supply votes? Destroy what was the local intermediary between himself and the worshipers, whose belief in Jesus were the very foundation of his position and right to rule? That was suicidal dementia, not strategy!
Besides, who in their right mind could believe that it was actually possible to ERASE money from the system, let alone property titles to buildings or institutions that had existed for decades, centuries in the case of some Catholic churches, hospitals or schools. Trump could understand that an occasional hacker would steal money, mostly by grabbing from a badly protected account, or obtain the genuine credit/debit card number of an existing client that he would empty out... But flat-out ERASE wealth without keeping any?

Preposterous! Who would be stupid enough to do this?

Leaning over the edge of the cement dais to look down disdainfully at the crowd at large, and the accuser in particular, the Papal Lord spoke into his microphones. "Inquisitors! Look at their phone screens and tell the audience what you behold! We shall know the Truth of this soon enough!"

During the following fifteen minutes, four different inquisitors stalked the rows of pews, taking about one minute per person to look rapidly through the phone's message logs and automated banking app reports while using their own smartphones to link with the White House cybernetic security division to let them access these devices to scan for viruses and validate the authenticity of the reports received. At the same time, highly ranked Special Supervisory Agents of the Papal Secret Service were using a very deeply classified listing of private cellphone numbers that would connect them directly to the persons in-charge of cybernetic safety for each of the major banks operating in US territories to verify events at the source.

It was nearing 11:56am in Washington DC when the loudspeakers of the Roseanic Chapel broadcast the voice of the US-PSS agent supervising the investigation with the main offices of the banks.

"Hello, Lord Amerikus, sir." the man began fearfully. "We have just finished preliminary conferences with nine major banking institutions and are in the process of contacting fourteen more as I address you. The outlook of the situation is this: for a period of time between 6:00am and 11:00am on Washington's clock, several hundred million time-delayed electronic instructions were logged throughout the entirety of the USA's financial and banking apparatus. While the most visible did come from several military, intelligence and White House servers, the vast majority came from several thousand attack bots spread throughout the web, including from outside the country. In some cases, several smaller banks saw their badly shielded servers become co-opted into becoming 'legitimization proxies' for the attacks aimed at the most thickly fortified banks and governmental systems. At latest count, some 700 small institutions across the planet were penetrated and virulated so."

The agent took a deep, shuddering breath, then continued his doomed report. "The hack-wave also reached the US Patent Office, the Bureau of Incorporations, the Internal Revenue Service, the Dept of Human Services, the Dept for the Property, Usage and Conservation of Land & Resources, et cetera... Basically sir, by using an inhumanly complex system of pre-programmed, time-delayed, cascading transactions & instructions sent out from several hundred thousand attack bots all at once... SOMEBODY managed to collapse the entire economy of the country in just five hours of work that we can see."

The entire crowd was struck dumb by the pronouncement, even if most had already suffered the blunt force of it on their own phone screen barely minutes ago. Trump was so affected that he was leaning heavily on the cement altar, unable to articulate his thoughts into something that could salvage the situation to his advantage. If this was true, then it was the most unnatural, anti-logical, counter-intuitive move that anybody considering cybernetic warfare would do. Stealing the money and reassigning the property titles and patents would be a master-stroke of genius. It would also clog the USA courts and World Penal Tribunal for centuries as the richest people and companies tried to defend themselves from being taken over by criminals or a foreign government. But to just ERASE

...
everything? To not take a single penny? For what? To avoid getting traced back and hunted to death?

"Ahem, sir?" asked the voice from the speakers, trying to get the Papal Lord's waning attention.

As the Man-in-Charge was completely lost to the world inside his mind at present and unresponsive, it was one of the Exalted Lord Bishops who rose from his throne to reach the altar, signaling at the cameras for the agent, no doubt watching live, to proceed with his report.

"Well, my Lord Bishop, we have received reports from the banks that it wasn't only the white christian churches that got hit. From what they can tell us, somebody used the classified registers held by the FBI, US-PSS, NSA, DEA, ICE and a dozen other policing agencies, to hunt down and bankrupt every church, mosque, synagogue, temple, meditation hall or homeschooler they could find in the tax rolls. It was a blind, sustained, clear-cutting of ANYTHING faith-based or serving to promote, defend or teach religious creed to anybody. And that's not all the hackers did."

Crossing his arms over his chest as he wrapped his white woolen cloak over his fearfully trembling form, the Lord Bishop nodded firmly towards the cameras, certain the US-PSS agent would see and understand the gesture. Now was not the time for cowardice, not when they needed so badly to understand the full spectrum of the attack and the damages wrought.

The ghostly voice came from the speakers again: "Well sirs, the hackers didn't limit themselves to emptying out the bank accounts, investments or erasing the property titles of churches. They also went after absolutely everything and anything that was known to be – denominational – in any way, shape or form, even if the religious affiliation was supposedly secretive or hidden from view. Then, these bastards got nasty beyond all forgiveness. When they attacked a church, they pauperized the house of worship itself, the main holding company, the trust funds, the investments, the charities to fund missionary activities abroad, then they took out the catechism classes, the schools for kids, the hospitals and medical assistance for the elderly parishioners... Sirs, these hackers EXECUTED the entirety of each and every faith-community they could find, identify and delimitate in the cyber-world."

Whelming a superhuman amount of courage, the poor supervising agent continued his tale of woe before he was interrupted by his bosses again. "Sirs, that's not all the hackers did to our society. When they identified a faith-group for eradication, they also found out the names, coordinates and personal or classified informations about each human they had ever come into contact with. Present preachers, nuns, monks, reverends, deacons, pastors, and also the lay servants like teachers, secretaries, accountants, janitors, guards, doctors and nurses... Then they hunted down and destroyed the donors who kept the organizations alive with money and free services... Sirs... The hackers went after the people themselves, in their own homes, in their life savings, in their pension funds... The attacks have wiped out salaries, investments, kids' trust funds, school bursaries, student loans, home mortgages, insurance policies and payments, inheritances from dead relatives... They even erased several judicial settlements that had been won by churches or faith-agents since the year 2000. These hackers, sirs... They have bankrupted and pauperized almost 211,000,000 of our 325,000,000 legally listed citizens inside of a few hours... They broke our population, and our governments... Our experts, sirs... They... They don't know if we can survive this hecatomb past dinner time tonight..."

Shaking himself from his shock-induced torpor at long last because that last revelation was just THAT enormous that it jolted him awake, the Papal Lord asked aloud, aiming his unsteady eyes at the cluster of cameras above the crowd to address the US-PSS agent the same way his Exalted Bishop had done. "Is there anything else? What other damages were done in result of this attack? The government! The budget! Did they touch the Dept of Finances, or the US Reserve? What about our millions of expense accounts for all of our departments, agencies and officials? Can we still
function as a state?" he asked, now in full panic.

The agent replied "My Lord Amerikus, the US Government accounts have all been put under the cybernetic equivalent of a 'Judicial Seal of Inquiry' that means they can still receive deposits but no longer make any withdrawals or payments, even those that had been pre-authorized for years. As far as we can see, only the municipal governments weren't touched beyond loosing all control over the faith-based entities & organizations on their territory. Both Federal and State levels have essentially been seized & put in escrow until a different government is elected, or a change in political system is committed. The federal policing apparatus and military of the USA are now devoid of funds passed the petty cash kept in the disbursement offices of the ships and bases. That's one week of pay for the men, with a similar time frame of food and services upkeep. If, and that's IF, it wasn't already paid out. Also, we have been made aware that the automated lending apps in the banks have all been programmed to reject all USA governmental requests for loans, mortgages, or the issuance of certified debt like bonds and promissory notes. If you want a loan, you'll have to sit face-to-face with a CEO of a banking group cuz the system says we ain't worth de nada anymore. The country's attempt at a White Christian Regency is busted, sirs, and the bag we put our coins, people and hopes in has been ripped to shreds so we can't use it again, too."

Trump was completely, utterly, irrevocably flabbergasted by the news.

His entire planning had been based on holding exclusive control and influence over the 50-odd million ultra-conservative white evangelicals that were in the process of becoming an endangered race inside their own country. This combined sense of minority, racial dilution and inevitable cultural irrelevance were all being properly fanned ablaze by the ecclesiastes in the churches, since these faith leaders were those who had the most to lose. After all, as the minoritization of anglophone whites diminished the primacy of European culture, it also exponentially eroded the number of worshipers that tithed their coffers thus reducing dramatically their spending/living power.

Money was a great motivator, that way.

But now it was all turning against Trump, his team, his voting base and the entirety of the faith-based system that had raised America above all others. With the churches materially and legally defunct, it would be the secular government that became the real, genuine leader that it had been supposed to be for the last 300 years. By all logical thought, the population would never again allow the ecclesiastes and religious movances to monopolize so much power, laws and rights out of the hands of either the basic human populace or their elected representatives. No, the Era of Faith Regency dreamed of by twenty-some generations of white evangelical christians had just come to crash and burn all around them, along with every other denomination, movement or religion the country had tolerated since its founding.

That was when it hit Trump in the mind like a freight train; the reason WHY the hackers hadn't taken any money for themselves. Because riches and power weren't their solution of choice. No, scorched earth, the Tabula Rasa of the Roman conquerors of yore, was both the method, the goal and the desired end-game here. The total destruction, revocation and erasure of America so those responsible could then possess an empty sandbox to build in without pre-existing conditions or constraints.

Would they ever find the guilty? Maybe.

Would it do anything to change the situation? No.

No, it wouldn't change anything. Nothing could change, or undo, or roll-back what had happened.

And that seemed to be the consensus amongst the pauperized, bankrupted elite worshipers, priests, ecclesiastes and church-mongers in the audience as they rose in a great angry tide of white-clad
humanity, throwing fists, feet, spittle, cellphones, gloves, jewels and anything that could hurt or injure at the soldiers and ceremonial assistants around the nave. In mere seconds after the Papal Secret Service agent's last words, the eruption happened with the strength and sustained force of the Kilauea volcano in Hawaii. Barely two minutes later and the religious assembly had disintegrated into a bloody, inhuman carnage that was now reaching up to the raised dais, threatening the safety of the Papal Conclave who were forced into full retreat, all under the unforgiving glare of the live-stream cameras as they had never ceased to record for their networks.

The American White Christian Regency Era had ended in miserable bloodshed before it had even truly got a chance to start anything real or durable. What a fucking waste of flesh, blood, work-effort and time it had all been. By dinner time, not even D.J.Trump himself would ever admit anymore to having had any part of it, even when confronted by the films of the epoch.

Un-civil Unrest, Rebellions and Secessions

(Green Day - American Idiot)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 12:00pm - noon
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 09:00am
United States of America; All over the country

The clock had barely struck the last chime of noon that what was left of the United States of America was already ablaze and collapsing under the combined efforts of anti-Trump, anti-Christian and old run-of-the-mill anti-government groups of all sorts, like the ultra-violent 'Sovereign Citizens'. And those were only the internal problems that could be seen on what was left of big-name television chains. you also had to take into consideration all the external enemies like Russia, China and Micronesia, plus all the Allies that had been instantly horrified by what they just saw on TV and the Internex feeds. The lurid spectacle of torturous depravity so publicly exposed on television in the past three hours had once and for all settled all questions about the immorality and inhumanity of the people in charge of what they had the gumption to still call "The Land of the Free" just because they had arrogated for themselves the capacity to harm and exploit the People without being countered, or made responsible before the courts of law.

So much for "freedom for all citizens" and the "American Dream".

Atop all the legitimate protest groups that had already been legally organized since the 2016 elections and given a new boost in 2020 with the obviously botched electoral process, there were now added all the specific subgroups that had become 'open targets' for all sorts of criminal persecutions, disappearance and death from Trump's decrees in the last five days. Jews, Romani, Arabs, Blacks, Latinos and Asians of all social classes were now trembling in fear and hate alongside the caucasian white women & children who could no longer trust anybody on either side. All religions, including several smaller denominations of Christianity usually found in arabic countries, were now subject to openly violent discrimination, to the point of being hunted down for extermination by the national police and armed forces. Even doctors, pharmacists, psychologists and secular school teachers were no longer considered 'proper' citizens, nor allowed to live peacefully inside the country. The Trump government was trying hard to make every white man alive inside american borders act according to these new lists of taboo knowledge and undesirable characters, and was fully prepared to punish cruelly any who failed to lethally enforce these bigotries on their neighbors or kin.

Now, after seeing the public torture and death of several provenly honest prominent officials of the
federal governance who had served faithfully for several decades each, the general population finally
realized the deep truth about the crooked, depraved, bastards that had hijacked the last two elections
for the presidency of the USA.

They were a bunch of defective, degenerate sexual predators who raped, maimed and murdered for
orgasmic pleasure, and stole from everyone they encountered to finance their lifestyle with the labor
and resources of anybody else than themselves. For four years already, the People of America had
seen the kinds of corporatist grifters and savage capitalists that Trump had nominated to the highest
postings in the federal apparatus, when he deigned make the effort to actually fill the vacant jobs.
These men had all been career fraudsters who made a show of attending church and making large
donations to charities to cover their filthy, perverse, habits happening in the background. They raped
Nature, enslaved Humanity to the soulless machines of the companies, and destroyed the social
protection laws of society, specifically because those were the crimes they wanted to commit to
sustain their debased acts against their victims.

Team Trump had promised to 'drain the swamp of DC'.

They had done that alright!

They had 'drained' the city of all normal, honest, dignified persons then filled in the empty space left
instead with the criminals from all over the country that had paid them, or given them lip-service
during the electoral campaign to concentrate these crooks in the seats of Power, Authority and
Justice.

When people had said in the early 2000's that Emperor Palpatine in George Lucas' Star Wars
prequels was a direct negative comparison to George W. Bush, they were wrong. Many now saw
that the famous fictional character was instead a forewarning of the meteoric rise of Donald J. Trump
and his coterie of lick-spittle's who stood in for the moffs and Imperial Bureaucracy with exactly
similar results of corruption, violence and ineptitude.

Probably not what either GL or the cinema critics of the day had thought, but true nonetheless.

As it were, such high elucubrations about media, philosophy, politics and the 'social contract' were
all well above and beyond the reach or care of the average person in the streets of America this day.
Yesterday, there had been the promise of Law & Order, however tenuous, corrupt and bigoted it
would have been, it still would have kept the society somewhat functional. Today, there was no such
thing in sight anymore; only lawless anarchy and raw chaos so unfettered that each and every
deviant, criminal, mobster and terrorist would exploit without any consequences.

It started most predictably: by millions of white skinned children in organized schooling, ages 6 to
18, revolting openly with hard, merciless violence against the religious paddy-whacks that planned to
beat them into submission under the transparent excuse of "corporeal christian dis'k'plin'nis" as per
the Old Testament in the Bible. These kids weren't stupid; for the first time in the country's history,
there had been a legal decree that forced their attendance at Sunday School, so they were forced to
watch TV that morning to see the Papal Lord's message in controlled circumstances. Millions of kids
saw what was happening to old, strong adults, some of them recognized heroes in the police or
armed services, and they now knew that they would be next to suffer for the sexual satisfaction of the
perverts.

Conclusion: to survive in safety, the perverts must die quicker than they can regroup to arm up and
take the fight to the kids. Since the average class size in US schools is between 30 and 45 throughout
primary and secondary levels, the teachers were vastly outnumbered at least 20-to-1 after all the
'colored' and illegal immigrant kids had been removed from the tally. This was when the adults found out that wielding a leather strap or wooden paddle to scare the kids into compliance with physical pain, and the shame of being publicly beaten like a dog, only works if the child is alone and not afraid of something worse already. The priest-commanded teachers who were still on the job, exclusively all white men at this point of the country's history, got surprised in a bad way when the kids decided that getting a few bruises, or even broken bones, was a cheap price to pay to rip the weapons out of the adults' hands to beat them to death with it.

The teachers' surprise didn't last for long, as you can imagine.

Since the kids all over the country were now aware that any white adult male could arrest, beat, rape and kill them without any sorts of retaliation from anybody, the basic rule book they had lived by to date got thrown out the window, with the dead teachers and their bibles. Banding together under the leadership of older students or more capable members of their age groups, the young people began barricading their schools into makeshift forts, crafting crude weaponry out of every piece of wood, metal or glass they had, plus preparing pails with mixed cleaning liquids in lieu of chemical weapons to dump down on attackers from the safety of high windows. Soon enough, the kids were taking over the cafeterias and trying pell-mell to cobble up meals and tally reserves, to figure out how long they could last. Always the conclusion was that they would be limited to what they could find by scrounging the streets around if they wanted to endure without adult help, but those territories offered pitifully little to consume. It wasn't like the government or private companies would just give them food and supplies anymore. They now needed to find or steal foodstuffs, the sooner the better as most schools never kept more than a week of comestible reserves in the cafeterias.

This of course meant that kids in densely urban environment were doomed to failure practically from the start as they would need to leave their improvised forts to reestablish in zones with large dense woods or farmlands to supply their food reliably. Since very few of the city-bound kids actually had the life experience, varied education or mental acumen to think along those lines of complicated tactical and logistical realities, there rapidly emerged a handful of 'leaders' in each school who had specialized in playing video games of the 'Age of Empires' or 'Civilization' styles. These youngsters became de facto the new visionaries, leaders and managers of the youth revolt, making so that barely five days after it had begun, the 2020 Youth Revolution had emptied practically 75% of the urban schools' population, moving those willing to follow the hard road in life out of town. Usually, the kids moved out by stealing yellow school buses or teachers' cars, sometimes by getting help from white women who were fleeing the same ways. They relocated to rural areas, far away from concrete-bound cities so they could create small support communes and freely gather, hunt, fish and harvest to stay alive independently from the white adult men who would harm them.

This period of unrest and emergency youth migration towards the wilder zones of the country would have a dramatic toll on the numbers of survivors, and their health, since it occurred in the beginnings of one of the worst winters ever to hit the country, and it covered all of it with equal force. However, it was actually acknowledged, both inside the few remaining seats of power in the US and by experts abroad, that there would be more children alive with this exodus than if they had staid in the schools to be captured and victimized by Trumpists and other criminalized adults. This sad, deplorable situation pushed many farmers and village dwellers to open their lands and homes to fleeing children, re-starting the antiquated system of money-less barter and trade that had founded America - lodgings & food versus farm work - that allowed hundreds of thousands of young, barely-autonomous kids to find an anchor to steady their lives and survive.

Meekly, with few meager means, but survive they did.

Tens of thousands more did not have such chance, as they were captured by Trumpists, by secretive organized cults, by organized crime, by street gangs, by isolated pedophiles, by serial killers wanting
a cheap thrill, or by the occasional brutal bastard wanting a household slave to do all the work while he sat drunk and useless as he'd always been. Then also was the merciless climate; winter's bitter cold, snow and sleet froze to death several hundreds of thousands while hunger and chill-borne disease took several tens of thousands more.

Even though millions of children managed to survive alone or by returning to their mothers, millions of others died alone in those first ten days following the Low Mass. This was a crippling blow to a generation that would see all the millions of dead white children soon joined by hundreds of thousands of kids of other ethnic groups as all the systems necessary to society like grocery stores, hospitals, police and public works all shut down savagely. Nobody wanted to leave their families alone in the clearly happening civil insurgency, so the critical personnel were absent from their posts, and so the numbers of deaths linked to lack of medical treatments, delayed surgeries, undiagnosed illnesses, accidental traumas and criminal traumas all went up dramatically. For all practical purposes, this was a generation that would be even more decimated than those that occurred during the period covering World War I, World War II and the South-Asia wars combined.

At the same time as the children of society were breaking their fetters and grasping liberty by violent forcefulness at the cost of their lives, the second greatest social strata of America was waking up from its long slumber. After witnessing the inhuman depravities done in the name of one single god against all other gods and followers of other faiths, the tens of millions of worshipers living in the US, legally or not, began to shrug off the torpor caused by so many long decades of elected officials and judges sympathetic to freedom of faith at all levels of governance and civilian life. With so many laws and rules favorable to the exercise of almost every religion that was ever named aloud on the public square, most faithful devotees had not even thought that a return to an obligatory theocratic / monotheist regime of government and society would ever occur inside USA borders any time soon.

It was after all, the Land of the Free. Or at least, it was until five days ago.

Well, now these cultural and religious masses were woken up fully, aware that all their rights were being stolen and their standing in society was getting erased, along with their person-hood and lives if the small collective of white protestant evangelical fanatics wasn't stopped cold. That would be harder to accomplish than to say, but it would happen. Nobody from any religious denomination, including millions of white skinned women and children related to these bastards, had any intention to let it all continue unchallenged.

As soon as the Papal Conclave of Bishops' first Low Mass had collapsed into chaos when the ecclesiastes saw their moneys and holdings had disappeared, and the television feeds were shut off at their sources, the other priests, rabbis, mullahs, imams, nuns, pastors, preachers and lay acolytes addressed their families and followers that had been gathered around them to watch the show as they had been obliged. They had been ordered by the federal government's brand new Department of Ecclesiastic Laws and Cult to stay home or go to their own places of worship to bear witness to the mandatory broadcast. The feds didn't really care what the colored folk did for the moment, so long as they stayed away from the white-only areas that had just been decreed by law; that meant every public, private and religious school in existence as well as several tens of thousands of churches and temples that now had a placard on their entrance warning colored people, women and children to not come in as only white adult men over the age of 25 were permitted anymore.

The resulting mobilization of forces was far more organized and successful than that begun by the white children in their schools and homes. This could be explained by the simple fact that the groups assembled in the 'other' places of worship were in fact complete family groupings, not just individuals without support like the white community which had been purposefully separated and
segregated to keep them from supporting each other. The bigots wanted only white men in power and saw ALL others, including their own wives and children, as enemies to survey, exploit and destroy. For the Papal Lord to rule, the white men had to be separated and indoctrinated in a special manner, but everybody else could be fitted in the same trash bag as that is what they were in his eyes: trash.

The result however was a super-exclusion of white men from all zones where the rest of the 275 million non-white/non-male citizens were percolating the basis for a revolution that would forcibly reshape the country and the rest of the planet by the shockwaves it would send out. Given that the social structures (family & cult) amongst the colored groupings were still mostly intact and that entire families had been packed into the small poorer churches, mosques and synagogues to watch the odious program and plan a collective reaction, it didn't take long to organize survival strategies and neighborhood defense patrols.

America loves guns.

In fact, America loves guns more than it loves people or Nature.

That small fact was clearly not in the minds of Trump, Team Trump, the main backer of Trump – The NRA Council – or any of the military planners they consulted in preparing their impromptu little regime change without having the population's permission.

If the fools in Washington DC and their coreligionnaries locally, in the states and cities, had bothered to open their eyes and watch reality around them, they would have seen that their hard-core block of 5 million mostly white-male NRA members were a clear minority in the environment, even inside the Trumpist movement. However, they would also have seen the two following critical facts:

#1- Only about 1 in 75 people who own a gun will ever be part of the NRA or donate to their organization. Most ordinary gun owners shun the NRA as extremists with clear sectarian undertones that clash horribly with modern American values and lifestyle. The gun-maker's lobby having stood in opposition to any reforms following a slew of school massacres from 2014 - 2020 cemented in the minds of large population basins that it was time to fight back against the weapons sellers and their ilk. The results were clearly visible as recorded gun sales slumped and NRA money movements towards politicians began being tracked and exposed publicly for the first time ever.

#2- The number of 'colored' people who legally own guns is staggeringly high, and almost none of them ever have anything to do with the NRA or its associated churches, groups and lobbyists. There are several tens of millions of 'non-white' gun owners and even several hundred thousand white under-aged persons owning guns that have never been surveyed, charted or listed by the NRA or the Trump camp.

That means that when the 50 million rabidly fanatic supporters of Trump split apart into the 'manly-men' on one side and everybody else on the other, you get to see that only about 22 million white males aged 25+ are the actual leading/thinking/working class the Papal Lord bases his calculations on. Whereas reality demonstrates that there will be an opposition force numbering in the 200+ million people with guns & munitions, with many hundreds of thousands who were trained in the army or police academies before racial discrimination became the law of the land, a mere 5 days ago.

Just on the numbers, there wasn't any ways for the Trumpists and white-power apostles to win.

Fanatics, however, don't look at numbers. They 'feel' their god compelling them from within and follow that feel all the way to Perdition, dragging their family, neighbors, society and everybody they touch down in flames with them.
Better to die in Glorious War than witness the "Great Holy Crusade" proven a failure.

And that is what would happen, when a few million middle-aged and elderly white men would attempt stupidly to march or drive in the streets with their flags and guns, trying to dominate, rape and murder to their heart's content. They would face blow-back on proportions that the Trump Team leadership had never even bothered to evaluate, let alone warn their troops about. This would cause immediate, violent and decisive combats that would see several large zones of the country being declared as "wild" and "forbidden to whites" because the few soldiers the government could field weren't enough to secure and patrol the entirety of the vast terrain inside the legal borders. This forced the Pentagon to create 'Enclaves of Purity' where whites would be concentrated and defended whilst the rest of the land was essentially abandoned to the hordes of heavily armed and organized non-whites / non-christians.

As the hundreds of millions of depressive but angry and determined citizens were being agitated to a frenzy by their community leaders and well trained members of their families, the white population that was being ordered to pack their homes in preparation to move into sheltered enclaves was undergoing a catastrophic collapse as the families exploded. The causes and process of that collapse would be discovered and explained only several years later, when the dust had settled enough for historians and sociologists to examine the remains of the failed religious tyranny without getting shot at.

DXS – NCIS arduous route to Vancouver

(NCIS - LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 12:00pm - noon
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 09:00am
Orange County; John Wayne Airport
Santa Ana, Los Angeles, California, USA

The combined teams of Naval Criminal Investigative Services agents and Department of External Services spies sat silently on the chairs and couches of the MD-11C refit's communal area, their coffees and food lay forgotten, gone completely cold and inedible by now. From the very first minutes of the television program, none of them had so much as looked at the foodstuffs for fear of getting sick to the point of projectile vomiting right on the moment. The hundreds of severed heads decomposing in open view of anybody passing by the White House grounds or walking on the actual site would have that effect on normally constituted people. What did this say about Trump, Team Trump, the religious followers and the soldiers who did this atrocity? Time only would tell. Now, three full hours later, even though the meal could be warmed up in the large gas oven or the micro-wave unit, nobody had any ideas but to dump it all in the compactor and switch the vents to max to clear out any residual odors, lest someone lose control of their sensibilities and began to retch out bile.

The entire country, and especially the Washington DC area, had seen all the major federal policing organizations beheaded in the cruelest acts of savagery witnessed on American soil since World War II, when the Germans, Italians and Japanese living on US soil had been stuffed in internment camps and left to rot until well past the official end of hostilities. In fact, it was an honest appraisal of the situation to liken it to the time when Europeans waged war against the natives during the colonization or what the Catholic Inquisition did to opponents of the Church during the middle ages. The only events similar to happen during the modern era were the revolutions of Mao in China,
Stalin in Russia and the Kim Dynasty in North Korea before it became part of the Montagnard Confederation four years ago, when Team Trump helped to disband the UN. In fact, even the pirate lords in Ethiopia, a blasted wasteland if ever there was one on Earth, knew better than to keep rotting cadavers exposed in open air lest they make people sick from the diseases born by the swarms of bugs that would fly and crawl all over the zone around each pike.

Now what did it say about America's much vaunted civilization and summit of human achievement when even the barbarians and criminals knew and acted better than them?

As they watched the television, the agents came to mind-numbing conclusions.

The NCIS Major Response Team was decimated and running for their lives, while four of the six administrative sectors were no longer operational at all. Eastern & Atlantic seaboard was wiped out and dark. Southern border & Gulf seaboard had been penetrated by Trumpists from the onset; under the pressure exerted by the late Eric Barlow and accomplices who had sided with the Papal Lord, no preparations had occurred at all thus the sector had imploded then gone dark. Western & Pacific seaboard was active but bunkering down in survival mode with little to no activities outside their few enclaves remaining. Northern border & Great Lakes had been betrayed from within, never prepared anything, was abandoned in a panic by its few agents and gone dark. Central - Heartland had simply never been important to begin with, never prepared and half the agents were Trumpists anyways, so it was abandoned in panic and gone dark. International Overwatch had been based in the Navy Yard in Washington DC so they suffered eradication at the same time as the Atlantic team, MRT and agency's directorate.

The FBI's three most prestigious and reputed teams, the Jeffersonian Forensics Unit, the Behavioral Analysis Unit out of Quantico and the Cybernetic Counter-espionage Unit, had been exterminated in the previous days or during the spectacle of debauchery, leaving the agency in tattered ruins. The regional offices based in the important cities had either gone dark or been co-opted by Trumpists, thusly completing the fall of the agency into policing uselessness and judicial irrelevance.

The CIA’s people all over the Agency had immediately gone underground, aiming to leave US soil with those dependents they could reach and mobilize in the briefest delays, regardless of obstacles or costs. After suffering 4 years of systematic social and political warfare from the president’s office, only a handful of white men had still been loyal to Trump. These 'relapsed fools' were known from the start, had been watched all the time, and were now killed-off on the very night that the 'Noah's Ark' protocols were activated. The agents and spies genuinely loyal to the true American People and constitution scuttled their buildings and major equipments they couldn't take with them rather than let the Trumpists use them to hunt down deserters and heretics. After claiming those critical materials needed for survival, the Company's people triggered thermite and napalm charges to incinerate all traces of their past work and projects, consigning their very existences to oblivion. Only once they were certain nothing remained that could be exploited by the enemies of the nation did they take out go-bags, weapons, fake papers and ID’s, then disappeared into the catastrophic landscape of the American Collapse, never to be heard from again in this life.

The NSA was a shambles of untold proportions, all homeland monitoring of citizens & tourists getting terminated on the spot with most of the equipments incinerated or at least sabotaged beyond any repairs, even by the teams of engineers who had conceived and built them. Just as had been planned with the CIA, all personnel scuttled their work-space then evacuated and initiated their own escape routes, with the ultimate goal being to leave the country altogether while using new ID’s for their whole family.

And those were just the agencies the people in the plane had some direct personal link with, or knew people who worked in them so they had a reason to search for sit-rep to know if they had to worry.
There was in reality about a hundred interconnected policing, customs, immigration control, intelligence and military security agencies reacting negatively all at once, covering nearly six million workers.

They did have to worry. The country was imploding at break-neck speeds.

Not about the classified or critical materials falling into the hands of surviving Trumpists, churches, foreign agents or whatever new government came after the failed regime, in the depths of the revolutionary period. Thermite charges in the server towers and flammable acid sprayed in the filing cabinets would insure continued secrecy by destroying anything with any tactical or commercial value. Since it was the CIA that taught that trick to its sister agencies, you can understand that pretty much all organizations or critical individuals participating actively in the 'Noah's Ark' protocols had built such scorched-earth contingencies into all their secure facilities that held material evidence, personnel files and surveillance reports. The same protections were placed in the operational hangars and armories, just in case they lost control over them during the unrest to such an extent they couldn’t move the gear out of enemy reach.

The USA was burning from the bone marrow outwards, and there were no firemen available to stop the cataclysmic self-inflicted disaster. At this point, it would be a miracle if local policing capacities survived to reach nightfall. When it was proven that a large percentage of police officers and detectives had in fact abandoned post to insure the protection and survival of their families, what little chance society had to keep standing evaporated like morning mist, and the criminals, depraved and monstrous took over the streets from then on. Since America was the country of the planet with the biggest carceral population, topping 3 million people every year behind bars, when the police and guards fled their posts to secure their families and homes, it left the prisoners completely free to work on getting out. Rapidly, contraband cellphones were pulled out of nooks and crannies to call outside, explaining that the jail was abandoned by the guards so the 'crew' could come in with a locksmith or cutting torches to rip the bars and free the inmates.

This led to two distinct events in the same very short period of time, all inside 48 hour.

Firstly; a massive outpouring of convicts, suspects and passive accomplices straight into the streets when badly secured low-level facilities were abandoned (or unlocked) by their staffers. This was usually transport vans, the cell blocks inside the courthouses, the small village jails built into the police stations and the hundreds of privately run 'juvenile delinquent' reformatories that saw the outnumbered guards and admins being swarmed and killed off quickly.

Secondly; massive, violent, and definitive turf wars erupted between rival gangs and mafias since the first group to come inside the prison would start by gunning down all opposition or members of rival groups they could find before taking their sweet time in either finding the damn keys or breaking the cell doors to release their comrades in crime. Since the guards had fled their posts in panic, that meant the armories and equipment lockers were usually full and the criminals took full advantage of these by stealing the stuff to commit one of the biggest and longest spree of unfettered chaos in the history of the country.

In any ways, the situation would lead, over the Sunday and Monday, to the liberation of upwards of 1 million criminals who were healthy enough to get out, and death of just a bit under 2 million in the savage exactions and stampede to freedom. This critical purge in the underworld's fighting force is probably what gave the few remaining civilian population a chance at survival above the flat 0% that it actually was.

Even worse though were the mentally ill and deeply insane that took to the streets in droves, breaking out of the hundreds of sanatoriums and prisons that were abandoned by fleeing guards and
doctors who decided instinctively to concentrate on familial survival just like the cops did. Within those 24 hours, more than 50,000 dangerously disturbed and fundamentally psychotic individuals confined in state-run asylums were accidentally, and catastrophically, weaned off the medications keeping them docile and harmless. This broke their fetters, allowing them to eventually claw their way out of the concrete cells that had contained them for decades, finally becoming free to roam the streets to prey upon the unsuspecting few menial survivors, all isolated and weak.

The worse part was that it didn't stop there; according to statistics compiled by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental illness) and NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) There were close to 10 million Americans moving freely around the streets while suffering from a slew of critical mental illnesses that rendered them prone to sporadic fugue states or episodes of delusion-driven violence that often led to injuries and fatalities. This was added to the deplorable fact the two organizations had compiled DOJ (US Department of Justice) numbers that clearly stated 24% of people of all ages put in prison at any time in the last 50 years had in fact suffered from grave, recurring but never treated, mental illnesses that were the cause of the abhorrent behavior that led to confinement. That meant that on the moment the country collapsed, some 11.5 million people with mental conditions needing drugs, supervision and physical restraints were loose in Nature, unwatched and unbound, acting solely on the whims fleeting through their damaged minds.

This was the true killing blow to the imploding country:

The rampant epidemic of psychological ailments that had gone undetected, untreated, and willingly never spoken about in governmental circles, had finally exploded out of control. After centuries of desperate people self-medicating their phantasms, demons, delusions and depressive states with alcohol, drugs, prostitution and aberrant deviancy, it all finally went off the rails and crashed without any chance to repair the damage.

Whether public asylums, private sanitariums, luxury private rehabilitation clinics or religious 'New Age therapy' camps out in the wilder lands away from towns, none of the thousands of mental health institutions in America survived passed dinner time on Sunday evening. By Monday morning, most would be empty or housing the last few patients who were so deeply disconnected from reality that they had no autonomy and could not move out on their own so they would soon die of starvation, still inside the walls of their cells. In many ways, some historians would later say these early fatalities abandoned inside the asylums were the lucky ones of the era since their pain would end faster, and less cruelly, than the survivors outside the walls.

It took a good half-hour passed the Low Mass before anybody in the DSX airplane was stable enough emotionally or physically to speak up without risking the chance of retching on the spot.

"Okay... So, THAT happened... For REAL... What do we do now?" Wilt Bozer asked in soft, disbelieving tones as he watched the splotchy unstable images of the CNN newsfeed that had now been reactivated following the cessation of computerized central censorship upon the collapse of the White Christian Regency and its associated church groups. Without his billions of dollars in hand, Trump couldn't pay the churchmen, his cronies or the country's soldiers anymore. And without armed soldiers he couldn't intimidate or command anybody anymore, not even his sympathizers and willing accomplices since they no longer had any profit in following the fool. And that meant that little proofs of tyranny and church power like controlling the airwaves and Internex contents, stuff done by cronies and low-level minions, was no longer getting done as they weren't getting paid anymore. Now, The Truth would be heard spoken aloud again on American airwaves, no matter what happened or which damned ecclesiaste bitched about it going against God's will. For a few hours more at least. Passed dinner, nobody would remain in the broadcasting centers to say or
"We try to call home, get our marching orders confirmed. What else can we do for now?" answered Jack Dalton vaguely, not looking at anyone specific as he tried to digest the spectacle of inhumanity he had witnessed over the last 3 hours. Needless to say, he was having pitiful results to date.

Riley piped up with a pale copy of her usual playful grin, quipping "Guess that means 'Get your butt online with the bosses, girl!' or some nice, polite request of the sorts. Such kind, considerate coworkers, I have in my job." she snarked weakly with an unsteady smirk as she stood to head for the plane's SCIFF, located passed the communal area, just before the cockpit.

"And don't cha forget it, girl! You could be out there working with Elwood instead! Think about that, why don't ya, while you're getting Matty on the horn." Jack replied back with more attention and a bratty smirk. Teasing his pseudo-daughter was always fun and a great morale booster.

"Hey, if Elwood's involved, can I switch mine out with yours? I don't go that well with James, and the job would get done a lot quicker if we were kept separate." Angus pleaded with pouted lips and sad puppy eyes aimed at Riley's incredulous face. Just how in bloody Hell was it that a 27 year old man could make a face like that and be credible about being put-upon? How?

Shaking her head in despair that wasn't all theatrics, the young woman marched into the plane's tactical comms array and shut the door behind herself to dodge further gentle requests – slash – pitiful supplications from grown men who should know better and act their ages. At some point. She hoped it would happen eventually. She was an incurable optimist that way.

Sitting in one of the four large plush swivel chairs, she dialed in quickly the numbers she knew by heart to connect with both the DXS directorate and the NCIS EAD – PAC. It only took two rings on each number to have the connections established and the operations managers at both ends calling in their bosses for the conference. Riley toggled the intercom, bellowing 'gently' for her crew to come in for the confab.

It took barely three minutes to have the entire complement of ten people assembled jam-packed in front of the monitors, with Shay Mosley for NCIS and Mathilda Webber for DSX on the remote lines. Both looked tired, haggard, and much worn out by the events of the night and morning, a lot like the field agents themselves. By the looks on the two women's faces, it would get a lot uglier before it got better.

"I won't say 'Good morning' to either of you because it isn't, not for anybody." Matty started up with cold sarcasm dripping from her words. "The country's swirling in the crapper on its way to the pipe, and the rest of the planet will probably follow after us real fast. Don't forget that the USA is the biggest producer/importer of material goods, services, sciences and technical development on the mudball, as well as the self-styled 'safety currency' for every sovereign country in function. When we fall, the planet will immediately go into global recession for three to five decades, complete with skyrocketing inflation, catastrophic unemployment, crippling poverty levels causing bad health epidemics, abandoned factories and an apocalyptic rise of criminality across all places touched by humanity."

The people aboard the plane were stunned by the lack of preamble and sheer gut-roiling anger coming out of Director Webber. Director Mosley didn't help any as she confirmed her colleague's words. "We have intercepted chatter from the cartels all over the South and Central American sub-continents. They are now making open moves to publicly formalize their working relationships with the generals and elected officials of their countries' national governments. There was in the air a smell..."
of rot and putrefaction, like an overripe fruit that finally explodes due to the accumulated gases and fluids inside, revealing to the world that a nasty bout of 'regime change' was in the works in Mexico, in Honduras, in Brazil and maybe even Ecuador. What was before an occult, illegal relationship that could lead to prison, or death due to pressures from the US government, would now become the new normal for these countries. In a climate of abject unemployment and poverty, anything that gave jobs paying a small bit will be getting credibility and status with the local authorities such as it would never have received before."

Making a face of disgust, Mosley continued in the same vein of thought. "On top of things, we have received initial signals from the African continent and Asia Minor that the large criminal groups of these areas are quickly moving against the local governments to offer money and services so they can be positioned as king-makers in case either Europe, China or Russia want to restart the Drug Wars that the USA wasted so many billions of dollars with over the last 6 decades. As it stands, the companies or groups that produce food, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, medications and firearms will be the new power brokers on much of the planetary surface for the coming century. In certain areas, lets be honest, it will simply be business as usual but with less risk of local police, US or UEO interventions. It could take that long a period to repair the system-wide injuries and dysfunctions caused by the collapse of the USA, and bring Earth back to a level of habitability and civility close to what we have lost today."

"And while all that doomy & gloomy stuff is majorly important in a 'our reality is at stake' kinda way, euh, how does it bring us to the million dollar question?" Angus chimed in. "What about our mission up to Vancouver? Is that still even worth the effort? Is it relevant to the survival of our families, cities or country anymore?" the young blond haired male asked, completely stressed out.

Matty shook her head sadly as she answered "No Mac, it's not directly relevant or useful anymore, not for the USA at least. It is however vital for the stability of the planet that the young man be brought over to the UEO's capital city at New Cape Quest, before a drug cartel or rogue nation gets their mitts on him. Another threat is the plethora of churches, sects and cults that would want to either control his tech or execute him publicly to motivate fervor against jews, kids, doctors, technology, heresy, and any other damned thing the priest has got a beef with that day, the way Trump's people wanted. But let's not forget: it's the UEO that owns and operates the atmospheric recycling towers, the Internex backbone, the World Bank, and the all-important orbital anti-ICBM pulse-laser satellites above our heads. All of which are operated with a staggering 99% automation and regulated remotely from heavily militarized management bunkers under NCQ. If we want the planet's lungs, livers, veins and nerves to keep on functioning, we need this kid back in Florida at the 'hub of all things' so he can sit in the middle of the cybernetic web to keep out hackers, vandals and foreign spies. And that is still a relevant, immediate concern for us all."

Shay Mosley passed a weary hand through her long lavish black hair, discretely trying to untangle some loose knots at the back of her head as she spoke to the combined team. "It won't be easy for you. As far as the World knows or cares, the nation of America no longer lives and no government agency has survived the fall. Your badges may be respected by the soldiers and agencies in Canada as a courtesy to servants of a dead ally, but not for long. My planners guess that by the end of the current year 2020, in barely 2 weeks, all American passports, badges and travel documents will become utterly worthless, even on the black market. The reason for the delay is a combination of bureaucratic laziness with good old fashion utilitarianism; all the countries have the habit of changing laws, taxes and a plethora of stuff on the change of the civil year, so out of habit they're all gonna kill off the USA's system presence on the last day of 2020. Not that some of the worse rogue nations haven't issued such decision already. Several small countries in Africa and South America have suffered under the drug wars and the US's prolonged fights against communism/leftist governments that made millions of victims, mostly through collateral damages and impoverishment of areas by economic sanctions. A lot of groups are wanting payback right now, and they can finally get it now
that the US army no longer operates as a centrally managed institution of law & order, under one flag and oath for all."

Director Webber jumped in with the nasty truth: "This means that your DXS or NCIS papers & badges will be good in Canada to go in and talk to officials, but not necessarily to get out, let alone with a sick kid genius in tow. The very best you could get at this point is a – monitored – audience with the teenager, and maybe get to accompany him on an Air Canada flight to Florida at NCQ. And that's IF the UEO makes a formal request for his presence through official channels, and IF the young man accepts the orders to move out of protected lands. Let's not kid ourselves people; with the USA dead to the world, Canada is now the big fish on the entirety of all three american subcontinental zones. If the liberal progressive government currently in power in Ottawa doesn't want to participate in the extradition for internal reasons, or shrugs it off and lets the kid decide in the name of respecting personal freedom, then the entire thing's flushed down the pipe. And, let us not forget that as of now, the North American Confederation exists only on paper, not in reality anymore. What happens next with the NAC seat on the UEO executive council is completely unknown, as is the continued survival of the NAC itself. There are wildly speculative rumors that both Canada and Mexico could deploy their armies across both borders to do a spontaneous land-grab to get some valuable resource-rich territories on the cheap. That's unconfirmed, even by the people we have embedded inside both nations by the way, but still... Tongues are wagging already. And that's another thing to consider: it may not be in the immediate national interest of Canada to let the boy go anywhere, and they may already have several tasks lined up for him, in exchange of safety, respect and privileges he could never get in the USA, even with his two large companies working full time at the high levels of society that they were."

Jack Dalton asked to the assembled people "What could Canada do to stop somebody like, let's say China, the third biggest nuclear power on Earth, from waltzing in with its Republican Red Army and grabbing the kid to exploit his tech? Even if you ignore the computer stuff, isn't he some sorts of medical genius too? I bet that's gonna be valuable in this day and age, no matter what nasty stuff happens cuz the USA tanked out. I mean, making medicines and drugs will always be valuable, right?"

Surprising the group, it was agent Lund who answered the Delta Forces soldier's question with an even more unexpected reason. "Bio-weapons. Lots and lots and lots more of bio-weapons. Technically speaking, Canada doesn't have anything harmful stocked and ready to deploy via missiles or artillery shells. And it's the forerunner in applying the planetary conventions against creating and stockpiling biologically destructive organisms. It's been that way since the inception of both NORAD and the UN, then continued through the North American Confederation and UEO Treaty membership. However! Canada is also rated amongst the top 1% most capable countries on the list of nations with active biomedical R&D facilities that work with antibiotics for diseases, antidotes for poisons and commit systematic studies of epidemiological patterns and contamination vectors as part of the World Health Organization's early detection & prevention mandate."

Taking a deep breath, Sebastian continued his lengthy explanation: "Basically, Canada has, in secured laboratories owned and operated by private research firms under contract with their Ministry of Health, several exemplars of the rarest, most dangerous, LIVING diseases, parasites, fungi and molds that can be found on Earth to date. Several of which have no known cure yet. And all are kept in industrial facilities that can easily mass-produce these toxins then activate/weaponize them. The means of dispersal that bio-weapons experts think the Canadians would use are as simple as contaminating the cans of Campbell soup (produced in Toronto) to sicken millions in any country they choose, likewise with Quebec maple syrup which is a luxury delicacy renowned across the world. Or they could taint several different batches of generic medicinal drugs usually sold without prescriptions from one of the thousands of manufacturers located inside their land that ship to the rest of the world, including China, Russia and into the known rogue states through back-channels,
contraband or officially sanctioned humanitarian convoys. If they decide to be cheap-assed bastards, they could just recycle the several hundred pounds of contraband Fentanyl & derivatives they seize during customs inspections or police raids to mix the powder with other generic pain-killers like liqui-gel Advil, and ship it out blindly to the population whose army attacked them."

Detective Deeks winced, saying aloud grimly "Easy-peasy, innit? Canada's defensive strategy isn't based on huge boats, tanks and fighter jets that would kill its budget and bankrupt the population under crippling taxes like we had to endure in the USA. No, the lazy bums have gone the way used by plants for eons – the toxic gland. The blasted thing is harmless for them but ruptures and poisons you from inside when you bite into them, just like a venemous mushroom. The real kicker though, is even if you manage to survive the poison, you still got weakened enough from the illness that other big predators will swoop in to finish the kill for them, without any heavy lifting or huge money expenditure on their part. Cheap, dirty, and deadly efficient."

MacGyver griped gloomily during a brief silence: "Lazy is just an opinion, and only from the standpoint of traditional military might and direct strength the way Trump and his team liked to threaten, but not stupid. Bio-weapons and biomedical R&D are not for stupid people, not in the least. And definitively not useless as a defensive tactic, either. It's actually deadlier than nuclear weapons but less costly and has more applications in civilian life for creating cures to real diseases, thus it actually produces positive results to boot, unlike most of anything else that's usually under a military research grant or development project."

Lund pushed his glasses up his nose a bit, responding to Deeks "Well no, not fast at all. You can harm or destroy them, but unlike plants, the reaction isn't immediate or automatic. And it does take a lot of planning and effort to deploy, like any nationally managed weapons systems of that grade. BUT it is a lot smaller, more nimble and more versatile than any nuclear or conventional forces potential enemies would use, and completely hidden inside the regular biomedical research facilities of universities and private companies all across the country. There was a secret report made by somebody in the CIA in the early 2000's that said some people in the Canadian Armed Forces were interested in the principle of mixing toxins with gasoline or diesel the same way that south-american cartels did with cocaine to pass it at the US border in tanker trucks. Their idea was that since their country is a major exporter of petrol products, they could poison the fuel and then let the unsuspecting drivers be the vectors of their communities' demises without much of an effort on Canada's part. That's the sort of thing that anybody attacking that supposedly 'most peaceful of all peacemakers' has to worry about, if they want to make an act of war against the northern giant."

Kensi Blye swore softly "Ah, screw it all, people! This situation could get ugly so damned fast if these people got spooked by one of the seven remaining nuclear powers... Or some little dip-shit country with an overly ambitious military force they don't control all too well, like Iran or the Montagnard Confederation. Not to mention they could just open the valves on the materials stocked inside the hospitals, vent it out the regular AC ducts and voilà! Instant calamity all around the town that was being attacked by foreigners. I mean, how hard would it be for their engineers to set pipes from these hospitals or production centers to the nearest atmospheric recycling tower to let the winds or oceanic currents pollute the whole planet for them? Isn't there like 20 or 26 of the damned giant concrete fuglies on their land already? This is a country that helped the USA through two world wars, a dozen conflicts in Asia and another four or six in the arabic zones... They were buying most of their military equipments and training programs from us or England, France and Germany so it's all shared between NATO allies for close to 80 years now. Just how much trouble would their army techs or civil engineers have to build up the system that would wreck the mudball on the push of a button?"

The female NCIS agent's words were followed by a few seconds of thoughtful silence as they contemplated the depth of the pit they were already sinking it, regardless of their wishes.
Director Mosley cleared her throat noisily, then finished her thoughts; "And that's why the mission is no longer relevant per se but must still go on – somehow. Yes, it would be useful that you go up north and make contact with the young scientist. Just on the strength of his medical expertise in pharmaceutics, neurology and implantology we could easily find several uses for him as we make efforts to rebuild our society from its ashes. But, once you leave the Los Angeles metropolitan zone, let alone the USA's defunct borders, we can't help you anymore in any way, shape or form. And there won't be any backup coming in. You would travel alone, and have to decide if you come back or make a new life where you end up, since no credible repatriation plans could ever be made from our end. As such, I have decided to leave the decision entirely up to you. Be aware, however, that we have ample space in our new sheltered enclave near the container port to house you, feed you, and we could definitely use all of your expertises."

Matty smiled sadly at them, finishing with "This is a lot to take in, especially with the slew of depravities and chaos that just occurred in DC on planetary television. Take some time to talk about it between you then call us back with your decision when you're comfortable with it. We will support you whichever way it goes. And remember that DXS has its own bunkered enclave as well; those who would prefer to be with us will be welcomed. All of you are good people, and I won't turn you away even if you just come for a friendly visit between allied groups."

The lines closed after the exchange of basic – timid – polite wishes, leaving the room silent with only the background humming of electrical wires and the soft bluish lights from the backlit keyboards.

After a minute of paralysis, the persons began to slowly file out, back into the communal area so they could discuss their options.

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Eastern America; 13:11pm
Western America; 10:11am

After the mixed crew was seated again in the communal area, the copilot went to the kitchen to start up a new batch of coffee to replace the cold wasted stuff that was being flushed out and put some garlic bread to toast in the large hybrid electric/gas oven, otherwise they were all going to have malnourishment migraines on top of the stress, anxiety and disgust experienced this morning. It was just some plain sliced white bread with some ordinary garlic margarine spread on it to bake in the heat for a few minutes, but it would fill the void without fuss, just like when he was a kid himself. And the plain old Maxwell House coarse grind for the 36 cup conference-sized percolator wasn't as fancy as the fan-dangled little Keurig pods could do but it would suffice too. In times of hardship and raw feelings, people needed the reassurance and stability given by the homely plain old recipes.

Watching their older colleague putter around the kitchen, Jack decided to help the man with his good idea whilst the others were seated in diverse positions around the room. Most had a vacant look in their eyes and were all clearly psychologically traumatized by the morning's events, some more than others, as they silently contemplated (or tried to forget) the morass of crime, depravity and destruction they had witnessed, followed by an equally cataclysmic video conference with people that weren't really in charge of anything anymore. God knew Jack was traumatized too, just older, more seasoned and more experienced at stowing the hurt into a dark nook at the back of his soul until he could lock himself in his bedroom to let it out in a safe, silent place that nobody would bother him while he broke down. If he didn't already have PTSD from some 15 years in Delta Forces followed by a solid decade of undercover work for the CIA with Afghanistan as Mac's EOD guard for a few years, this today would certainly have given it to him. Given how banged up the others were from their lives and careers with a badge, he really wasn't surprised they were all stunned out cold.

Agent Gregorio was sitting close to agent Lund, looking vacantly at the insides of the hangar by the
plane's viewport beside her as she rubbed Sebastian's shoulders while the man tried to regulate his arrhythmic breathing. Agent Blye and detective Deeks were sitting together at a dining table, holding hands as she reclined back into her chair's backrest with her face towards the ceiling while he looked into empty space straight ahead with dead glazed eyes that saw unspeakable things. Riley was sitting sandwiched between Wilt and Angus on the couch that faced the kitchen. She looked frighteningly unsettled and queasy as Mac rubbed at his eyes with the heels of both hands, his first sign of an impending grave migraine, while Bozer had his arms wrapped around his chest in self-hug, leaning forward with his eyes closed as he tried to shut out the world of horrors around him. The main pilot was rifling around the small cabinet that held the alcoholic liquors, pulling out the cheapest, hardest US Heartland whiskey he had so he could 'medicate' the new coffee pot when it was ready; they would all need the liquid courage to go any further today.

"Seb? Will you be okay?" Tammy asked as she looked towards her partner, worried about his condition. Sebastian hadn't had a panic attack in several months now; the multiple hard take-downs of criminals and combat injuries he had lived through since becoming qualified for field work by FLETC had solidified him quite a lot. But, unfortunately, there was a limit to how much anybody could change their innate nature, and Sebastian Lund was clearly reaching that limit again.

"Whaaa? No! I'm fine! Honestly, just a little outta breath, d'as all..." the male agent replied suddenly returned from his spastic episode and more aware. "Running around this plane is just murder on the cardio system you know, with how long it is and we have to always be fast and..." He looked around the room at the amused – and incredulous – faces of his colleagues then threw up his hands. "And you don't believe a word I just said. Okay, then! I give up! I was having a bloody panic attack, so sue me!" he grumped as he wrapped his arms around himself in a protective self-hug much like Bozer had done. "After all the bloody crapulence we saw and the damned vid-meet afterwards, you'd think a guy had a right to lose his marbles in peace, but noooo it just too much to ask for with these persnickety people!"

Tammy Gregorio burst out in a fit of chuckling as she leaned into her friend's side, wrapping her arms around his prone form, pressing her forehead to his left temple in a gesture of friendship and support, even as she continued to laugh at his expense. Angus managed a small tight smile that turned into a wince as he closed his green eyes, trying to fight the pounding inside his head, at the top of his skull. Wilt snorted loudly, giving Sebastian an amused look as he quipped "If you were really panicking, you wouldn't have time to worry about other people's opinions." This comment made poor Riley lose her composure to burst out laughing whilst Marty and Kensi glared at the lot silently, still not recovered from everything they saw and learned yet.

Shaking his head tiredly as he put the whiskey on the low table in the middle of the conversation square, agent Sampson asked "Isn't anybody worried about what the young guy at the other end of all this is gonna think and do? I mean, we're about to decide whether we're going over to Vancouver on what could quickly become a one-way trip to nowhere, especially since I betcha US currency won't be worth bloody Trump's fluffy blond mullet by lunch. Shouldn't we call the kid now to get his decision on all this, instead of just showing up on the canuck's doorstep like a shit fly at a pick-nick?"

Deeks passed both hands up and down his face in a gesture of weary exhaustion, blowing out air through the mouth in a loud exhale of frustration. Giving his fiancée a look to see she was still leaned back all the way, eyes now closed with a congested expression on her face, the young man girded his courage to answer the pilot's valid question. "Yeah. I'm thinkin' real hard 'bout it. I don't know anymore if we have any reason to go up there to meet the wunderkind. Sure, having him work for us back at the NCIS enclave would be beneficial, and taking him to the UEO would help the whole world, but there is an absolute zero quantity of reasonable arguments that support the guy moving. If anything, given he was targeted personally by Trump and his crusaders, he could be said to have an immediate and credible fear for his life if he leaves Canada, and the canadian immigration authorities
will certainly see it that way. Even at the risk of pissing off what's left of the US military complex, which isn't much or centrally managed anymore by now, I can't come up with a scenario where the beavers let the kid go to his death back in LA or San Francisco. Anywhere near Washington DC would be unthinkable under any conditions for years to come, no matter what bright ideas you got. And New Cape Quest isn't all that big or defended compared to Florida as a whole. No walls or fences to separate it from the rest of the state so it's easy in & out for any mercs or fanatics that would want to make the effort to reach him there. Unless they bury the kid in a bunker with Section 7 sitting on his skinny ass with a leash around his neck, they won't be able to protect him, let alone convince him to move from Vancouver."

Tammy Gregorio added blithely "Not to mention that we were going there to take his statements as affidavits for the courts to start investigations and charges against a slew of elected officials, bureaucrats and high navy brass. With the whole country swirling in the can, there aren't any federal policing forces anymore, let alone any functioning tribunals to hold trials. Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure the Papal Lord and his conclave of senile bastards probably modified or erased all the laws that we were basing our authority and investigation methods on. Legally, it's a credible argument that we no longer have any jurisdiction, authority, or mandate anymore since the government's down and dark."

"I concur with my indubitably esteemed colleague," Marty replied in a pensive yet still snarky tone as he gazed absently at his hands as they lay on the table before him. "By international law, our homeland is defunct and therefore so are any pretensions of authority, mandate or policing powers that we may have had in the past. Our badges are now just souvenirs of a by-gone era whose cadaver hasn't finished cooling yet, but it's a dead cause nonetheless. Sampson's right. We shouldn't assume that Wolenczak will cooperate with anything but his own self-interest, especially if his life is at stake. He's already badly injured with possible infections in progress in the surgery sites on his legs; that would make anybody rational think long and hard about what gets done next."

Jack Dalton walked out of the kitchen with a large bowl of cold coleslaw and quartered dill pickles that he had taken from retail plastic containers inside the large fridge. The chilled vinegary taste of the slaw an pickles aught to help settle everybody's stomachs a bit, especially with some garlic toast and a few bits of cold cheddar cheese on the side. It was more an emergency snack than a real meal, but then again none of them were really hungry or stable enough to swallow a heavy preparation. Jack thought to himself that as long as they ate a small bite to not have only coffee sloshing around their gut for the trip, they could last until arrival in Canada without getting nauseous. He hoped. Mac looked passed nauseous and well into fully sick already. Setting his burden on the nearest dining table, he went to crouch before his prone friend then laid a hand carefully atop his head. Damn, but the kid was burning hot!

"Mac, you're out'ta it man. Your oversized noggin's flaming hot, and I don't see it getting any better in the next few hours without help. Take some pain relievers, eat just a bit of toast and orange juice then go lie down in your bunk with an ice-pack on top of your head. There's no ways you can function like this. We'll call the kid and get his decision before we move anything, so don't worry. We ain't gonna fly off half-cocked and blind, not if there's no nuttin' waiting for us at the other end."

Wilt got up from his place to reach across Riley so he could help his tall lanky friend get to his feet without face-planting into the low coffee table in front of them. Steadying the swaying man as he rose, the two made slow progress to the dining table where Mac was sat and served a small glass of juice while Jack jogged to the bunkie to fetch the blond's personal traveling medicine kit.

Riley pursed her lips worriedly as she witnessed her friend having yet another grave episode of spontaneous brain pains that were bad enough to practically lay him down cold. Nodding firmly to herself, she fished out her smartphone to find the number for the young doctor Wolenczak and dial
him up, then she plugged the phone to the cable that would transfer the conversation to the
conference screen mounted on the wall so everybody could participate.

The sounds coming out of the speakers around the large monitor happened to be a song or theme of
some sorts but no-one in the plane could remember what it was yet. The music played for about ten
seconds before it was rudely replaced by loud crashing noises and much swearing in seven different
languages that weren't English. The conference monitor's automated translation program activated
and the long streak of obscenities was promptly translated to plain old US English, including the
scrolling text banner at the bottom of the screen that showed the written version of what was being
spoken on both sides of the vid-meet.

Somebody had obviously woken up on the wrong side of the bed, and wasn't shy about saying it out
loud for the world to know.

"Oy vey, das uneheliches kind der scheißkerl!" resounded crassly through the sound system while
the screen staid completely black as the person on the other end had only authorized audio-out for
now.

The US teams exchanged amused glances as several understood many of the phrases without the
help of the translation software but they still winced a few times at it seemed they had gotten the poor
sickly teenager at a bad moment.

Some more noises of flesh hitting solid wood rather sharply were heard, accompanied by a pained
howl of "Ostie de chiennne baste mal enculée! C'est pas c'que je veux, Tabarnak!" and an air searing
"пульт? где же трахающий пульт?" that was promptly chased by "Watashiniha, jigoku no tōi
tōzakete kudasai!"

Finally, after the noise of a drawer slamming shut on wooden furniture, the screen changed image for
the darkened interior of a bedroom that was lit poorly only by the wood stove's cheery glow and a
pitiful filet of weak sunlight coming by the space between curtains that weren't completely closed off.

Lucas Wolenczak was seated weirdly, quite uncomfortably prone on the plushly carpeted floor
besides the bed, on the side next to the room's inner door, trying somehow to climb back into the
extra-large bed by using the blankets as impromptu ropes to climb along until he reached the flat
surface on top. He absolutely needed to stretch out his aching legs as he answered the damnable
phone call that woke him after a miserably short five and a half hours of medicated, exhausted sleep
or else he'd have cramps all day like happened yesterday.

He was NOT a happy teenaged boy, no he was not.

"Who is it, in the damned name of Lucifer Morningstar and his cohorts of red-skinned, pitchfork
wankering, goat fucking spawns of a sewer pipe is it that DARED to wake me before I had 12 hours
of shut-eye?" Lucas growled angrily as his arms strained under the effort to get back into the warm
comfortable bed he had fallen from. "I want bloody names! I want to know who had the dangling
hairy round balls to wake me when they could have sent a fucking email like everybody else! It's not
like the bloody planet is ending or the continent's burning to ash!" he continued griping vilely even
once he was finally seated on his mound of thick warm blankets again.

Blinking owlishly at the Internex monitor which was the only source of strong light in the bedroom,
the adolescent cussed out "Oy vey is mir! Can't you people do anything without somebody holding
your hands? You know, like adults? Like people your much vaunted ages are supposed to do?" he
snarked at the law enforcement agents good and hard. Making a great many noises of displeasure
and disapproval, the mussy-haired blond teen moved around the blankets so they covered his legs up
to his abdomen and crossed his arms over his torso, adopting a mulish expression on his face that
bode ill for the coming conversation.

Riley just couldn't hold it in anymore. She exploded in belly-deep hearty laughter at the poor kid on the screen. "Ah ah ah! You have the same face Mac makes when he wakes up after sleeping seated at his desk, with his face on his keyboard like a pillow! - Snort! - And he has the same style of boxers too! I guess blue plaid is really an eternal fashion for men, no matter age or social status." the young woman teased both the boy and her friend with a big smirk. Said smirk was now being shared by Jack and Wilt as the black male patted his childhood friend on the back gently in fake-sympathy to avoid making him motion-sick.

"I will be revenged!" Lucas Wolenczak promised in low ominous tones as he squinted blearily at the monitor, seeming to be trying to match voices and faces with the personnel files he had memorized last night, when he had analyzed the team coming to meet him. "There will be blood! And pain! Let us not ever forget about the pain... Where would the world be without pain...?" he menaced in a breathy voice more suited to an elderly asthmatic granddad than a threatening teenaged boy.

"I could do without the pain part" Sebastian Lund said, with his hand raised at shoulder level as if he were in a classroom, speaking to a stern teacher. Tammy put her forearm in front of her face to stifle her laughter as the boy on the screen was suddenly paying a lot more attention to their lonely pair on the couch than anybody else.

The kid's biting reply was interrupted before he could even articulate it by the fact he yawned wide enough to pass the DXS's plane through with considerable clearance at the wingtips. Blinking again at the intruding light from the screen, the young male scratched at an itch on his right thigh through the layers of blankets as he tried to focus on the people and conversation.

It wasn't happening any time soon, in case you were wondering.

Getting fed up with the stress, uncertainty, and the fact both their mothers were waiting for them at home in a non-gated neighborhood, without any experienced support in the building, Marty Deeks stood up abruptly from his chair to stand at the narrow end of the coffee table, some 10 feet right in front of the monitor so the built-in cameras automatically focused on him.

"Excuse us for bothering your peaceful sleep with bad news about how the whole fucking world is coming apart at the seams, doctor Wolenczak, but, well, the whole shitball is burning. So there. I said it." Deeks exclaimed nastily at the whole room and auditor on the screen. "The motherfucking round turd-cake we call home is going up in smoke like a charcoal briquette, and we need to know what your opinion of the situation is. Mostly to figure out if we lose what precious little time we have left to save our families by going up north to meet with you. Cuz, you know, we don't really have any real reason to do that anymore."

Passing a weary hand over his strained face, the pale skinned adolescent closed his eyes for a few seconds as he gave another try at whelming his tremendous mental faculties into working order. He was almost there, but just not completely. Well then, partial capacity would have to do for now.

"My apologies for blasting you all right from the moment the screen lit up. I should have waited to hear your explanation before I got my 'brown tongue' out of the suitcase." he spoke slowly and softly as he seemed to think through and line up a conversation thread that would be more polite and match the level of maturity that he sought to project in his business relations. "I do hope that I haven't offended anyone. However, given you all work in law enforcement, undercover spying and black ops, I really hope it takes more than a few harsh words yelled out by a kid to cause you any genuine discomfort. You're all supposed to be made of stronger stuff than civilians, afterall."

Riley came back at him gamely "Oh, were made of strong stuff, alright! But we're kinda cramped
for time, given the situation. Are you in any ways aware of what happened in Washington DC this morning and what the consequences for American society and Earth will be?"

Pressing the heels of both hands to his closed eyes in a gesture eerily reminding them all of MacGyver's own flagging health, the teenager shrugged inelegantly in a slouching way. "I'm guessing the blond-moppet-in-chief gave a racist speech full of religious shit, had some people arrested and tortured for fun in front of an audience, then he handed out new rights for white men and restrictions for everybody else. He probably pardoned a few dozen more of his financial backers that were still in jail going up to last evening. That made the justice system and all policing collapse, the kids and their mothers would have seen that they were now reduced to common 'public playthings' for the whims of whomever wanted something from them, and that they couldn't say 'no' anymore. This was exacerbated by the white men turning against Trump and his Bishops as their financial situations were being weaponized by Trump under the guise of 'prosperity gospel' at which point it was made clear to all and sundry that to reach Heaven, or be allowed any freedoms inside the White Christian America of Trump, you had to pay coin-in-hand or be enslaved as well. Then the churches, priests and cult-whores figured out they were completely poor because their bank accounts were mass-hacked so the dumbass assembly of defective monsters collapsed around their would-be messiah." The tired, sickly teenager yawned widely again as he put a hand under his T-shirt to scratch at his torso. "How close am I to what happened?"

The adults inside the DXS airplane were looking at the kid on the screen wide eyed. He had been asleep during the whole damned thing but knew about it all as if he had been there! WTF?

Waving his left hand in a vaguely dismissive gesture, Lucas grumped out "It's just basic statistics and psycho-societal profiling, with some few insider tidbits from what I heard from the World Bank while reassuring them that I was still willing to work for them no matter where I ended up. Any company that does serious marketing studies to sell products in the USA could have told you the same thing. Trump's voting base and the white supremacy swill he's been preaching for the last four years is actually the same thing that was being preached almost 400 years ago when the first white european settlers arrived in America. It's the same gut-rotting offal that was used to justify 400 years of slavery against all non-whites and fueled the christians to indoctrinate, abuse, torment and murder millions of children in the name of their damned god that doesn't exist for 2,000 years. Open a history book covering US history from the founding era onwards, or even just basic world history, and you'll see just how easy it was to predict everything that happened. Having watched the televised newscasts in the last two months would have given you the same raw data & result just as fast, too."

Jack Dalton moved to stand besides Marty Deeks in front of the monitor to ask "Fine, fine! That's all well and good, but doesn't answer the main question. Are you coming back down south or are we going up north?" Gesturing at the team around him, Jack told him how things were on their end: "This is it for us. We all have families needing us to stay alive in this mess, but, technically, we still have a mission to do. The problem is, we don't know what you'll be doing in it all. Do you stay up in Canada or do you go down south, like Florida. We heard that the UEO wants you in New Cape Quest pronto, and the beavers would like to keep you on their ice patch, but nobody's told us what YOU are planning in all this swirling mess."

Stormy luminescent flint-blue eyes focused on the Delta Forces specialist with a force of anger behind them that shook the older man. At that moment, Jack realized that this kid was hiding inside of himself a whole lot more hurt, anger and PTSD than he let out to be seen, and that was matched by the brains and information he carried locked in his noggin. The kid was a bona fide junior MacGyver that looked the same to the point they could be related like close cousins. And that worried Jack; he had an inkling what it was his friend had hidden away in his brain, and what he could do with it. Imagining a similar mental capacity inside the injured, sickly, tormented little guy that had nobody in the whole world to lean on for help gave him goosebumps all over.
If the kid wanted vengeance, and had no emotional attachments to hold him back...

What is it that could stop him?

Who was it that could help him back from the brink?

Sure; Jack or another Delta could find the kid and put a bullet in his head easy enough. But, like MacGyver, the blond munchkin would have contingencies and time-delayed events in play long before the sniper's shot reached him. They could kill him, neutralize him physically easy enough since he had no fighting training whatsoever, but they'd never control his brain or his willpower.

Living in close proximity to Angus over the last 5 years since their EOD patrol days in Afghanistan had taught Jack a few things about recognizing the symptoms of a super-genius plotting mayhem, and he was getting that vibe right now as he made an effort to look at the kid on screen while seeming as harmless and non-angry as possible for a man his size and age.

He really hoped it worked or they were screwed worse than when they woke up this morning.

After almost two full minutes of utter silence on both sides of the comms, Lucas made an impatient grunting noise as he roughly ran a hand through his mop of blond hair to shake and settle it in place a mite better until he took his shower. Inhaling a deep steadying breath, the boy glared at the assembled adults on screen without any mercy or 'give' whatsoever visible on his expression.

"I have been beaten and damaged all my childhood by nearly everybody that I met. I was almost enslaved by my father onboard an active service NUCLEAR warship and sent to international waters so that they could beat me, rape me, and murder me without answering to police agencies for it. I will carry scars and diseases, physically and mentally, from these events for the rest of my life. I can freely admit that I suffer from chronic depression, PTSD and recurring bouts of manic insomnia. My name and reputation will suffer, almost as much as my body and mind will, in the decades to come. And now, you want me to sacrifice what's left of my health, sanity and survival to help keep afloat the monstrous depravity of a country that did this to me? Have I missed out on anything?" he queried in a cold dead tone that forebode nothing good.

"You're absolutely right. And nothing will change that." Sebastian Lund spoke softly from his seat on the couch, near the Internex monitor. "We can't undo your misery. We can't erase your pain from the past. We could barely heal and cure your health if we still had functional hospitals to our name, because that damage is so big I'm not sure it could all be repaired. I know that from personal experience; because of my own phobias, and anxieties, and socially triggered manic episodes. I'm still a bit of a germaphobe, but I managed, finally, to beat back my hypochondria. Because I had help from friends, who were close enough to me to act as the family I needed to support me. Now, with society the way it is, I don't think we could find a functional hospital or medical team to work on your body, let alone your mental situation, anyways. I should know; I'm in the same boat."

The NCIS – NOLA agent adjusted his glasses before continuing, studiously ignoring the looks of sympathy and interrogation from the crew around him in the room. "What we can offer you though, is this: eight of the most elite, highly trained operatives in law enforcement, forensics, hard sciences and military interventions that are still working on the 'good side' of things at this point. We can serve as your close-in body guards, technical consultants, medical support and, specifically, help with the remote high-mobility part of any activity you have to commit. If absolutely needed, we could also do seek-&-destroy missions to nullify threats that have been determined inbound before they reach your vital space."

Sebastian concluded his argument very politely, taking care to keep it real and relevant to the young man's situation as they knew it. At this point, anything but raw reality would blow up in their faces badly, and it would be even worse if he tried any sorts of 'Trumpian' bombastic hyperbole. Lucas
Wolenczak had lived like no child ever should suffer, and achieved things few humans ever did in 7 or 8 decades of life, so talking to him truthfully was best to get him interested, even if he was laying out general terms only at this point. The relation would build-on from there.

"You would hardly be able to find anybody of our caliber, together or just individually, to compose a mission team like the one we have, even with your own vast resources. I'm certain that, through Wise Apothecary's internal security division, that you have several experienced people with 'potential' in hand already. But, frankly, I doubt the quality of both their formation and morality would match what we operate with, or the level of results we produce regularly as our base benchmarks," the New Orleans native concluded firmly.

The teenager sighed in annoyance as his last hopes for going back to sleep had just evaporated around him like morning dew. While he was tired and grumpy to the point of swearing like a drunken sailor if pushed the least little bit, the opportunity in front of him was just too good to pass. However, the potential benefits hinged on what they wanted as individuals, and as sub-teams. Deeks and Blye would clearly have necessities far different from the others, just like the Dalton - Davis pseudo family or the MacGyver - Bozer sibling pair.

Fishing his brand new black & blue armament-cane from the chaotic mound of blankets, Lucas turned towards the side of the bed near the bedroom's door and set the metal cane with his right hand, using the left hand to lean on the nightstand to help set himself standing on his legs besides the bed. Managing to stand up without face-planting in the carpet again was a vital necessity to reach the small individual coffee brewer on the counter next to the wall inset closets on the left of the monitor. Grabbing the long terrycloth bathrobe he had left on the wooden chest at the foot of the bed, he put it on completely, wrapping and tying it to his thin meatless frame to keep what little warmth he still had since leaving the safety of the blanket pile. Thinking about warmth, he walked unsteadily to the wood stove, using his cane and furniture along the way to keep himself upright and mobile. He put a pair of new logs into the stove then went to the hybrid brewer to prepare himself an 'emergency' coffee so he could be awake and more civil to speak with these people.

The conversation wouldn't be easy, he could feel it.

Flipping open the top flap of the machine, the teenager verified the water level then chose which type of hot drink he wanted from the small metal wire rack. He set the plastic K-pod in the slot and closed the device, tapping the intensity at 'extra dark' and the size at 'medium' since he didn't have his stainless steel thermal mug at hand. The serving set's ordinary porcelain mug would do for the moment. He could always fill up 'His Extra Precious' before taking a bath to relax his legs. Within seconds the aroma of warm espresso filled the room, giving the adolescent the last boost he needed to reach wakefulness.

"Alexa! Open the curtains for the entire suite, please." he ordered as he put in a full spoon of brown sugar with two spoons of cream in his mug to balance out the taste and cut the acidity so his empty stomach wouldn't rebel against so much potent caffeine coming in. Thinking about his gut had the boy open the mini-fridge under the coffee brewer to rifle through the assorted condiments, a few bottles of medications he preferred to keep chilled for better shelf-life and... Snacks! Well, edibles that weren't junk food at any rate. Some small mini muffins like they served with breakfast during the brunch hours, a box of half-sized doughnuts with six different types inside, and the jackpot he was looking for. A box of deluxe camping ration bars composed of granola, flax seeds, chia seeds, dried
fruit and shredded jerked bacon all mixed with honey then coated with pure dark chocolate for a real morning kick to the engine as well as good nutrition. And there was a bonus to them: it was the food division of his company Wise Apothecary & Chemists that had owned the recipe for a century and was back in production after a nasty decades-long hiatus that they were still recovering from.

Snorting in amusement at the irony of seeing his own products in the hotel's fridge, Lucas quickly made his choice. "Whellppp! Deluxe granola bars it is." he told himself as he took a pair to stuff in the pockets of his bathrobe. He set the cream back in the chill then carefully picked up his mug for the short trip back to the large cedar foot chest that served to store thick winter blankets or sit near the wood stove for a few minutes of contemplative warmth. Exactly the sort of emplacement and comfort that were needed for the coming conversation with the people on the screen. This would not be simple or short.

Once seated safely with his cane leaned against his right thigh, his espresso in the left hand, and a granola bar in the right hand, he gestured at Agent Lund to expound his proposal in more detail then took the first sip of the strong coffee. Gaaawd! That was good! A swift bite of granola followed, chewing slowly as he waited for his audience to get on with their offer.

Sebastian exchanged brief looks with everybody around while Lucas was occupied with his food acquisition mission before plunging into the fray once said teenager was back in the image. This kid owned a large company with several hundred employees (those they knew of) and half his fortune was in Europe with almost a quarter in Canada, so his losses following the US national crash wouldn't be anywhere near as fatal as they could have been. Further more, Sebastian strongly suspected the youth had moved a large portion of his known American moneys and holdings to Europe in the two days following his abrupt departure from San Francisco. It would have been stupid of him not to, and Lucas did not give him the vibe of an idiot, nor did he exhibit any chronic distemperment, despite the highly emotional situation. That level of ironclad self-control in any child was a sure sign of past abuse and torment; in a teen like this, with the money and resources he controlled...

The phrase 'evil mastermind' came to Sebastian unbidden as the boy's eerily luminous blue eyes focused on him through the Internex videophone connection.

Swallowing back his apprehension that he was dealing with a lesser devil, Lund moved on. "I will not try to deride or lessen your life experiences. You have suffered tremendously, but you're still alive to speak about it, so that means everything anybody needs to know. You have inherited a vast estate, but you were already building your own when that happened because laziness and idleness are not in your nature. Your multi-specialization between highly mechanical and highly medical is truly rare in the field, few people having ever managed it so thoroughly. I tried to find others of your age group as competent or eclectic, and none came up in my searches. Basically, you have the stronger negotiation position in this discussion. There may even be other strengths that you have beyond our knowledge, I'm certain it will be revealed in time if you need to assert a point with us. However, not everything is all rosy-dovey in your situation."

Lucas washed down the last bite of his first granola bar with some coffee as he stuffed the waste wrapper in the pocket of his bathrobe. Gesturing idly with his now free right hand, he signified to agent Lund to continue. He hadn't heard anything much to date, but at the very least the agent didn't seem to take him for a weakling or an isolated recluse that never lived. What exactly were they after? Or was it just Lund himself that wanted something? The facial micro-expressions in the adults on screen were both placid from tiredness and marred by stress. There was still too much 'situational interference' from the country's ongoing collapse for their emotions to have settled, so nothing to be discovered. Well, nothing to it; Lucas had learned patience the hardest way, so he would exert that skill to its fullest.
Sebastian folded his hands on his lap, pursing his lips as he ordered and lined up his thread of thoughts to speak it out clearly. "What we have here, doctor Wolenczak, is a two-sided impasse that we can't settle if we stay separate. Do note that I didn't say it wasn't survivable. Our diverse groups here specialize in chaos, disorder and getting the job done in war-zone conditions. Likewise, you have several properties built in the early 1800's that have tall brickwork walls and guard towers, including wet moats and mechanical draw-bridges that are shown clearly on WAC's corporate website. Or you could stay put in Vancouver, peaceful and healthy behind Canada's thickening border defenses. If either of us were so inclined, the status quo wouldn't be lethal in either short or medium term. In three or four decades, though, that would become a different ball game for everybody."

Taking a leisurely nibble on the second granola bar he had just unwrapped, Lucas swirled his espresso in the mug gently, gazing deeply into the dark beige depths as if he were scrying for secrets and divine answers. Taking a slow pensive sip, he raised his eyes to the screen again, slowly searching the faces of the ten adults he could see. He didn't have files for the pilots which bothered him only a little; usually transport crews were mid-rank agents, only averagely skilled in spy-craft or warfare, not like the pros actively moving the conversation.

It might surprise many that Lucas REALLY didn't want to have Sebastian Lund as an enemy, not anymore than Angus MacGyver. The tall, lanky, bearded forensics analyst had way too much facility with biologicals, chemicals, and diverse electronic technologies to be made an enemy unless absolutely necessary. And if Lund collaborated actively with MacGyver, an EOD tech who raised geekness into a high art, in an aggressive fashion against him, then Lucas would need to hire mercenaries for protection post-haste. He had always planned to have bodyguards from the moment his fool father Lawrence had made his move to forcibly exile him abroad, but he expected to have at least until coming Thursday to establish himself. Then the cretinous fucktard in the hotel administration had happened, and now the city's police wanted his head on a plate.

Didn't the twits in blue realize just how far above their pay grades this all was?

Concentrating his now fully awakened mental powers on the monitor's occupants, Lucas required in a neutral, dispassionate tone: "Could you please state your proposal clearly without preliminaries, agent Lund? If I can't see or analyze the underlying context myself, I will ask for supplemental information at that moment."

Nodding once, Sebastian forged ahead: "Basically this: you need a team of bodyguards that are not only competent, but also capable of following your activities without needing month-long lectures on the basics of life, technology, medicine or planetary politics at every decision you make, as you swim through the quagmire your life has become. The dregs of America want you alive to enslave, or your public death to inflame their followers. The Canadians want you alive to serve them somehow; preferably voluntarily, but under constraints if need be. Depending on how they set it up, it could even be legal and binding until you reach age 18 to liberate yourself from whatever 'legal guardian' or court supervision they forcibly assign. Likewise, you could probably successfully argue in court for emancipation without restrictions due to your immense scholarly and corporate results. I could see a judge in a Canadian tribunal giving you that, in regular circumstances. That is, IF the USA hadn't collapsed on their doorstep, and national survival wasn't at stake in the short term. Plus, as you came here seeking 'refugee status' whilst arguing to receive the go-ahead to become both investor-migrant and have dual-citizenship with America, I don't see any judge in Canada say that their federal government doesn't have a vested interest in the process, outcome, and capacity to keep you at work on helping the country survive the fallout from America's suicide."

Taking a gulp from a glass of orange juice handed to him by Jack Dalton, Sebastian continued his exposé: "The Europeans would dearly love to see you migrate over the Atlantic to establish as a
science provider and potential key player in several fields of industry and finance. Lastly, the UEO Alliance wants to get the World Bank's darling back home to exploit you some more, in exchange of the usual exorbitant fees they'll gladly pay you just as they have in the past. Everybody wants you. Everybody wants your skills and competence. But I have the suspicion that few people want your actual person, let alone your OPINION on anything that matters, especially if it means letting you out of the clearly delimited role of 'teenaged genial protégé' to somebody much older and better established. Your present autonomy is bound to have irked a lot of people, and we both know that the Canadians' CSIS is just waiting for you to fall into a pit that you can't pull out of by yourself, then they'll make the 'offer you can't refuse' and bind you just as hard as your father wanted to do."

Regardless of the reactions or expectations of his colleagues in the airplane, Sebastian was silently satisfied by the stone-faced observant demeanor the teenager maintained as he spoke. If the kid had accepted the first offer at the onset, it would have indicated something gravely fishy going on in the background they didn't know about. Likewise, if he had refused to even consider any kind of interaction with them, that would have been 'game over' and no options left to play. No; a silent thoughtful teenager meant that Sebastian had profiled the case correctly, and he was ready to offer the solution right as the customer needed it.

"I don't mean to be presumptuous, doctor," Sebastian said politely, "But you need us. You need our team, and specifically you need the one thing that nobody in Canada or elsewhere will give you any time soon: loyalty. You need a team of people who are not only competent and experienced, but also and most of all loyal to you personally. You have many enemies right now, many thousands of fanatics who would give quite a lot to see you bound in slavery like a mule, isolated uselessly in a jail cell, or just plain dead so you no longer posed a challenge to their organizations and creed. In either case, your opponents are legions, but your friends... Well, since the beginning of this case, we haven't exactly seen or heard from your friends, have we? And given the exactions of the Papal Lord and his crusaders, I wonder how many friends are still alive, or in any shape to help."

Locking his oddly shining electric-blue eyes on the face of agent Lund, Lucas asked in deceptively mild words "Are you trying to monetize your – loyalty – was it, by the hour? Like a rent-boy in a dark smelly alley, behind a bar at 3am? Will you bring the rubbers or will you take it bareback if I pay an extra 100$?" He snarked dismissively before draining the rest of his coffee, setting the empty cup atop the wooden chest he sat on, on his left side.

While the adults on screen finally showed some emotions, mostly outrage at his disrespect for their friend, that Lucas could perceive and compute into his profiling matrix, agent Lund remained calm, collected and unimpressed by the crass retort the boy had just dropped on him. Then again, the man probably expected to receive a cold shower on his first three or four highly hyped-up offers, just like any negotiations of this caliber normally cycled through. Lucas certainly expected to have his first few low-ball counters laughed at merrily until they had properly measured each other's true goals and capacities before putting the grain in the millstone for the real work.

Sebastian Lund was actually enjoying himself by now. The small outbursts of annoyance from the peanut gallery around him were both fun and informative, but ultimately meaningless in the conversation. By allowing him to run the meeting thus far, the rest had silently agreed to have him as pro tempore leader and Lucas would not react well to a change in representation at this point, even if these were just preliminary word jabs. He would however expect to have at least two fully mandated people sitting across the table if they met in Vancouver, as the group would have the plane ride to discuss their own realities to form a cohesive offer, unlike this ad hoc conference which was happening because – really, folks? – the civil war outside kinda forced it on them all.

"Your prices are a bit out of date, doctor" Sebastian replied with a smile that was all teeth. "Besides, this isn't Honduras or El Salvador, it takes more than 100$ to corrupt a federal agent in this neck of
the woods. And my base price starts at 10,000$, just so you know. I might be on the take, but I ain't cheap like some people I could name.” the forensics expert snarked as he delivered his own retort.

Lucas smirked playfully at the older male, nodding once in admission that he had been pulling his leg rather weakly. But then again, that amateurishly delivered piece of snide crap had gotten a reaction from each and every person in that plane, and that data was well worth trading small juvenile barbs if it fed him the information needed to settle his decision. It was the conversational equivalent of echosounding on a submarine; make a loud 'BEEP' then wait for the sounds to come back to have the picture of what surrounded him. The process wasn't pretty, and certainly not quiet, but it worked reliably in almost all circumstances.

Lund expounded more seriously "For your information, what I'm proposing isn't a transaction like boss & employee so much as a 'durable situation' where you benefit from the talents and support of human beings who will not sell you out for cash to the first bidder to approach them. We offer to work not only FOR you but also WITH you towards goals that we establish as common. Our methods will inevitably vary given the wildly different experiences and skills between us, but finding and maintaining common goals like survival, good health, defeating common threats, all that should be feasible if we discuss it clearly."

The adolescent was young and lacking in many experiences in his short life, but business negotiations and contracts weren't among those things he missed on. He had also studied a lot of history, so he had a vague sort of idea what this could become. Taking a wild guess, he decided to put a point for discussion on the table, just to see what nibbled on his bait. "Are you offering some sort of fealty oath like knights or samurai of the feudal era? I lodge, clothe, feed and reward your performances inside my... jurisdiction shall we say?, in exchange for loyalty, obedience and services commensurate to your skills and intellect? Is that the 'situation' you mean, or was it more in the line of a Justice League kind of loose arrangement between equals? There are variants of the concepts that could be adapted, since neither of the pure versions are culturally, economically nor strategically viable. Not with the planet's biggest money-maker swirling down the can as we speak."

Sebastian shook his head, answering amused "We aren't in Avengers territory yet, and I don't see us kneeling in front of you as you dub us at court with a sword like vassals. It would have to be a far more modern and flexible arrangement, but we also understand that the larger socioeconomic burden would rest on your side. Therefore, yes, a hierarchy would be necessary, and some people would be answerable to you or others, just like the jobs we had yesterday and in the years before. Whether that means straight out employment paid by your company, or just a seat in a loosely structured association will have to be negotiated at later date. What we clearly expect from you though, is first and foremost the right to bring our relatives to safety inside your walled compounds, with some degree of collective protection and support resulting from that communal living. Who gets what salary for which job should remain individual arrangements for now, unless familial groups express the need for a collective bargain."

The young man looked out the window towards the Capilano River, his mesmerizing blue eyes gazing idly at the evergreens and patches of glistening white snow stuck to the trees. Taking several slow breaths as his powerful mind computed the variables and risks associated to this very unusual situation, the pale skinned male answered softly "I think that the general framework of concepts in your offer can be molded to fit my own needs, in broad terms. There will be several particularities to settle with each individual person that knocks on my door to beg for shelter inside my walls. I have already accessed your service jackets yesterday before the nation's collapse, as well as your more personal permanent files. I took what I needed directly from the source servers of the organizations concerned, finding that each of you on that plane does in fact have the skills and intellect to be valuable inside my operations. With sufficient supervision occurring case-per-case, as I would be in charge and not inclined to let that point be challenged. By anybody. Especially not on MY land,
inside MY walls."

Turning his pallid angular face towards the Internex monitor, the boy swept cold inscrutable eyes across the adults present as he elocuted clearly; "Let me be blunt. I haven't asked this of you. Your team came to me with an offer. I already have plans and contingencies in place, actively protecting me in such ways that CSIS is particularly aware of them. The USA's economy didn't collapse without help. Neither did the moneys, holdings and property titles of the churches, ecclesiastes and sluts-of-the-pews disappear without assistance. I am the World Bank's PREMIER supplier of cybernetic security for a reason, and those who came after my life forgot that fact to their everlasting regrets. Canada, I am sure, will not make the same mistake as its southern neighbor did. Neither the European Confederation nor the UEO would tolerate such blatantly incompetent decision from our northern allies. It may take a trip or two to NCQ to remind the remaining nations of the planet, but I am mobile and willing."

Carefully standing on his aching, unsteady legs with the assistance of his cane, the adolescent scientist leaned both hands atop the pommel to stabilize his position as he concluded the conference from his end of the link. "If you come to Vancouver, I will meet you and negotiate in good faith with those present, based on what is provably in hand. If you choose to stay in the USA's dead corpse to protect your loved ones or begin their movement towards my territorial holdings, you will be dealt with by the facility manager on contact, and this person will negotiate according to his local authority. For those making the trip north, you should try to bring the airplane you are in. I strongly doubt the Canadians will let you keep it, and they most certainly won't give or sell it to me, but if you bring it as a goodwill gesture for their military, it could convince them to let you enter and move about instead of repelling you at the border. In the event that you do manage to come, I have reserved the suites on each side of mine for the coming month. There is a total of four enclosed bedrooms with variable sleeping setups that can be arranged with the hotel's administrators. That is all."

Sebastian Lund answered for the group without even looking at them; "Come Hell or high water, we'll see each other in Vancouver, this evening, in your hotel. Over and out."

'---' --- { SQ } --- { } --- { SQ } ---'

Eastern America; 14:17pm
Western America; 11:17am

After the screen had blacked out, the federal agents in the plane's communal area turned to agent Lund with interrogative, somewhat frustrated, expressions on their faces. This had not in the least gone the way any of them had expected, especially not the offer to get hired by the kid. Where the Hell had that one come from, anyways? And the brat admitted to hacking to bits the finances of thousands of churches and millions of followers? What the ever loving fuck was that?

"What's your game plan, Sebby?" asked Tammy Gregorio with a smirk and a playful tone, quite willing to go along with her NCIS partner as she knew full well just how good at gaming the system in his favor the bearded technician was. Her geeky friend had balls and badass fighting instincts that surprised more than one criminal into an early grave, so she felt safe following his lead blindly for a tic. He'd explain things clearly soon enough.

Taking his glasses off to wipe them clean, the bone-weary federal agent sighed deeply in exhaustion as he could finally relax from the mentally stressful confrontation. Regardless of his young age and diminished health, Lucas Wolenczak was such a psychological, scientific, industrial and political heavyweight player in the game that any type of interaction with him was draining. Sebastian needed several minutes sipping on his orange juice and nibbling on his now cold and dry garlic bread before
he was able to articulate what had just happened to the rest of the crew around him.

Marty Deeks however, stressed out, angry, and blindsided by the way things went, wanted specifications immediately so he pressed roughly on his colleague from the Gulf Coast office. From where he stood at the head of the coffee table, his words were biting and aggressive: "So you're saying the entire 'need' for any sort of meeting with this kid has nothing to do with law enforcement anymore? That it's all about positioning ourselves for getting the best jobs he could want to pay us for, and some living arrangements inside those castle thingies he owns? Is that about it?"

Kensi Blye raised from her chair to stand besides her fiancé, wrapping her arms around him from the right side of him in an attempt to calm him down from his adrenaline spike. It worked only half as well as she hoped, testimony to how badly wound-up her man was. The situation, the country's bloody, inhumane end, was getting inside all of their heads in a bad way.

Everybody's eyes were now going from the forensic technician to the LA police officer and back, all wondering what was going on. Several were in agreement with Lund already, with only a few still having doubts as to the actual realization of the spontaneous plan. Doubts, however, did not mean in any ways that they were opposed or thought differently.

Leaning backwards into the backrest of the couch he sat on, Sebastian sighed in relief as the pressure that had been building inside his cranium was finally going down. He may yet be lucky enough to avoid a stress-induced migraine. Having MacGyver on the floor already was bad enough, having him ill as well would be problematic for the group's plans since he was the closest thing to a medical doctor that they had aboard the plane. Looking to the couch across from the coffee table, he used international sign language to silently tell Riley Davis to dial up their respective HQ's to give their report to the bosses. Things had gone about as bad as they could, and this could very well be the last official acts of their careers as federally employed agents. Riley nodded, quickly using her smartphone still cabled to the Internex monitor to request a video conference with both agency's survivors. Deep in her gut, the young woman knew this wouldn't end well.

The OPS managers in both enclaves had their bosses online in less than four minutes, ready to hash out the details. Once Mathilda Webber and Shay Mosley were seated in front of their screens, both women were instantly aware of just how tense and volatile the crowd was on the other end. Sebastian gave an abbreviated report of the conversation, to the relief of all involved, while Riley uploaded the films to the servers of the two enclaves for analysis, when they had time to spare for it.

"We all have to be realistic right from the start. The USA is dead. And our police powers, our agencies, our support structures, all died with it. There was no manner by which I could intimate any sort of military power-play or leverage governmental authority against the kid. He's completely free, fully autonomous, and more than capable of supporting himself and thousands of employees at the same time. Plus, he flat out admitted that he was responsible for the cybernetic attack that caused the catastrophic bankruptcy on live TV of the entire white christian movance that supported Trump this morning. He publicly said Canada's CSIS was made aware and threatened to replicate the feat at will to insure his security and autonomy."

Sebastian took a small sip of his juice before forging ahead. "What we needed was something to keep him interested in our cause, of his own free will, just long enough to get that first meeting with him, all of us in the same room, talking about what our basic necessities are so we can all survive this clusterf**k. Because let's all be honest a freakin' minute here; it's not about police powers, agency mandates, court warrants or national security threats anymore. It's all about surviving long enough to worry about what we eat tomorrow, and will our loved ones be safe until we reach them. Now, if we can manage a deal with this kid, so much the better because he can bring a whole damned lot to the table to assist us in surviving. If not, if he balks or wants things we aren't willing to give... Well
The New Orleans agent rubbed his forehead to ease the tension building up again as he spelled out his views. "If he really refuses to help, that would leave us with one option to work with: talking with the Canadian government to negotiate our services as foreign agents partnered with them in the hopes that they would be willing to invest in our efforts to build up our enclaves, and maybe eventually stabilize what's left of the US population. That would leave Lucas Wolenczak to deal with the blow-back of not sealing a deal with us all on his own, which he's actually bloody well placed to accomplish, by the way. I don't hate the kid a single bit. I certainly don't disrespect him, not after what he's lived through and then managed to build himself a decent life anyways. I understand what he's doing now, today, to prioritize his own survival and health after being hunted to death by an entire country of crazies, but that comprehension's not ever gonna be enough to make me risk my people for him. Not now, not yet at any rate. Real friendship with him is possible at some point; I don't think he's unstable or defective, despite all the damages he took during his life. But, real gut-deep instinctive loyalty like I told him about, that has to be earned the hard way like with my team, not through shortcuts in the dark."

Wilt Bozer summed up everybody else's feelings on agent Lund's conclusion; "Hear, hear, man! We ain't for sale, no matter who's paying what! But it's also true what else you said; this guy's got the buildings, people, tech and money to pull a lot of weight behind him. And in this mess, if he decides to work against us, the force ratio will be like us trying to stop a speeding freight train bare-handed. He'll roll right over us and the UEO will probably push him along to make sure he doesn't stall."

Angus rose unsteadily from his chair to walk towards the conversation quad, leaning on the back of the couch where Gregorio and Lund were seated to stabilize himself before adding his opinion. "We have to look at this as rationally as possible. We can aim to become friends with this guy, it's a laudable goal unlike willingly making enemies of everything out there, like the Trump-sect christians did. But, in the mess we're dealing with, being friends with anybody is a pipe dream we can't bank on. As long as we can trade with someone equitably without getting shot in the back, or sold off to foreign enemies, it should count in the 'ally' column of the balance sheet. I'm sure both directors and a few people here would agree that in business, to make a deal and get paid for your work product, being buddies isn't required as long as you're normally reliable and honest. Besides, like detective Deeks said; the guy owns a series of 'castles' all over the USA and Canada. Each is a full square kilometer with three storey walls and guard towers that can easily be armed. Last evening I looked over the publicly accessible photos and historic blueprints of these places that Phoenix HQ was able to dig up since it was decided we needed to intervene in this guy's life. They were built mostly between 1800 and 1900, with at least two major passes of renovations in the 1930's and in the last 6 years since Lucas took over the Wise Heritage & Trust Legacy. I'm willing to bet he's got steam powered machinery to generate electricity and purify his potable water, as well as vast underground bunkers that could be converted to shelters for refugees until land for better housing could be cordoned off, cleared and built up."

Marty Deeks griped aloud, still very much angry; "No matter which way you see this going, we NEED this kid alive and healthy if we want anything from his companies or land. This is especially true because his workers know he's alive and well, stashed up north safely, so they won't just take orders from jack-shit walking in the door with a smile and a badge. Don't forget that a lot of his publicly known properties, corporate or personal, are actually inside Canada, and that country hasn't collapsed or been destabilized socially. His workers won't have any reason to accept a court warrant, even from the Canadian Courts, unless probable cause or immediate civil security are at stake. And presently, the beaver's federal government could be shitting diamond tacks in a golden plate and it still wouldn't pass muster with the dumbest junior litigator that has his Bar Association card in his pocket. We NEED this kid alive AND willing to help us of his own free will, or we are screwed. Trying to force him, or worse, kidnap him, will see us fighting against a rabidly defensive super-
genius teenager at contact proximity with tens of external enemies gunning for our hides to get him back. Or did you all miss the part about the UEO wanting to secure the World Bank's prodigal baby back in NCQ?"

Pilot Sampson swallowed the last dregs of his orange juice, thunking the glass down on the table forcibly to get people's attention. Seeing they were all looking his way, he spoke his mind. "I think that you are all making a mountain out of a horse dropping. This kid's gonna be involved in rebuilding the USA whether he wants to or not, and your many vaunted opinions won't even be what decides that for him. You've all turned around the point and touched it, but you won't admit it cuz you're all still thinking like big bad powerful adults who have the right to boss the little kid around, just cuz you're older and stronger. Or worse, you're banking on your badges and the backing of moribund agencies that can barely linkup with us for this pow-wow, let alone field agents and machines for a fight. Get a grip on your ego-swollen balls, people! Lucas Wolenczak was fighting for his life against adults a lot bigger and nastier than you young mooks since he was four years old. And he's still present to spit in yar eyes about it!"

Sampson snorted at them derisively. "NO! He won't be pushed or forced. He'll get involved because his lands produce more food crops than his employees' families can eat, so he'll sell that. His manufactures produce canned goods, both medicinal and foodstuffs, specifically to sell to wholesalers or store chains, so he'll keep on doing that too. His terrains have large triage yards for trains, 18-wheel cargo trucks, freight barges and even floatplanes. That means he can offer mechanics works, spare parts and maybe even some machining services to craft brand new devices. But he's in business, not a charity, so ya'll have to pay for it. But, because there's a buck to make, and he's already set for it, he'll be involved in the rebuilding. Just not by force, not free of charge. And most certainly not because some jumped-up high-and-mighty adults have decided in a locked room, in a closed meeting, that he would do it or be punished, the way his parents and Trump tried to do. We all saw how those ended up, didn't we?"

The oldest member of the team stood from his chair to go fetch himself a coffee. He'd eaten enough during the two previous conferences and following debrief that he could tough it without being sickened from too much acid in the stomach. Besides, that's what TUMS were for. His copilot joined him at the coffee pot while the actual field people exchanged flabbergasted looks with their agency bosses in silence. It seemed that everybody had lost sight of the most vital problem: the kid was on the run for a reason, and the myopic fools had been about to blindly replicate the mess while hoping for the same outcome Lawrence Wolenczak and Donald Trump had tried for but failed miserably. And the kid had openly admitted to sabotaging the finances of the churches, ecclesiastes and their fanatic following to break their strength and force them into poverty and uselessness. Which had worked wonderfully as shown on live TV.

Moronic dicks! Would they ever think differently than the fools they used to take orders from?

Director Mosley spoke slowly in soft but forceful words that left no leeway for interpretation or negotiation on anything. "Be that as it may, adultist bigotry or no, last time I checked, doctor Lucas Wolenczak was still a citizen of the United States of America. That means he's – nominally – ours, not the beaver's, regardless of ANY other opinions that any legal, political, religious or diplomatic figure could voice. Besides, with the great need facing us, we can't afford to listen to anything else than our population's clamor for survival. Deeks, take point and work with Gregorio on spelling out an argument for the Canadian Immigration Tribunal, general enough for their federal policing and military brass too, if the courts rule against us."

Frowning in concentration, the black woman enunciated slowly her astute strategy: "What I want is an argumentative that states: "The country is in dire, fatal and degenerating peril; therefore all viable personnel are required by the Civil Security Code to report to the local National Guard or policing
agency still functional to be surveyed, assessed and put to work at holding back the progress of the
disaster. Just like a communal chore to dike up a flooding river, blockade a forest fire or clean up
after a tornado, etc..." The Canadians are very civilized and community minded, with a very dim
view of boat-jumpers and cowards as they have shown in every war they participated in since World
War I."

Making a vague gesture of the left hand, Mosley added glibly "Plus, we also have some little-known
clauses for mutual support & survival in the North American Confederation's alliance charter that
actually cover what are deemed 'extinction-level events' since the mathematics say that a critical
asteroid strike could happen in the next 20 years. That, plus we did make the idiotic act of putting in
orbit giant space-stations with city-scorching lasers on them, despite the fact we could easily lose
control of them to a hacker of Lucas Wolenczak's caliber. Or the fact that we have about a hundred
of his sort under watch already. The clauses seemed to be a wise inclusion at the time. I wonder if the
writers of the charter had prophetic talents or just profiled who the country leaders were at the time...
Anyways people, that's your inroad to procure access to our juvenile doctor without the Canadians
getting upset to the point of setting their pet elk at your shapely backsides. From the NCIS
directorate's point of view, the mission is still valid and ongoing. The USA is comatose on life-
support, but not dead yet. Not as long as we keep on trying to make it whole anew."

Everybody, including Matty Webber, was looking at Shay Mosley as if she'd grown a second head
that happened to be yellow-skinned and spoke Korean. It took a good long minute before the copilot
snarked aloud "And now you know why you noobs are in the field while she's sitting nice and tight
in an air conditioned office, handing out orders like rain drops from the sky. Cuz she sees the big
picture, and you're all still convinced the 3"x6" screen on your phones is all the world there is.
Professionals, really? So much for tradecraft being a fundamental of the job description!" the middle-
aged man shook his head in disappointment, agreeing openly with Mosley that the team needed to
pull their heads out to smell the fresh air before they gave up.

"Whelp, folks!" Jack Dalton said with a wry smile, "I guess we just got schooled on business,
strategy, good manners and international diplomacy, all in one class. Unless one of you wants to
incur the wrath of the other big gal on screen, I think we aught to stop bellyaching and get this beast
on the tarmac for lift-off."

The argument should have been settled by seeing the two pilots walking off to their cockpit to warm
up the engines and call the air control tower to obtain a runway slot, but it wasn't.

MacGyver snorted in clear disdain at the last living assistant-director of NCIS, asking aloud "Are
you freaking nuts? Didn't you hear anything that either Sampson or I have said? Or even what your
own man Lund has explained? Is being idiotic, close-minded and rampantly attached to your rut in
the road a prerequisite for NCIS employ, or is it just a by-product of orbiting around Washington DC
for your job so long? Cuz I could swear that we just hashed out, very LOUDLY in fact, the WHY
trying to force this teenager into any action would result in catastrophe on the very moment he
became aware of the attempt. Do you want to see an Arleigh-Burke shoot a bloody Tomahawk
cruise missile with a nuke at your position? Cuz I could swear the G.H.W. Bush battle-group was
sailing the Pacific Coast not far from Oregon going southwards, yesterday morning. Do you want the
kid to hack through the task force systems to find himself a toy to fling at you? You CANNOT force
him or approach him with violence and dishonesty! He'll react hard like an allergic shock and you'll
end up having an entire city wiped out in the backlash! He just pauperized the entire damned
country! All by his lonesome, in front of all our eyes to prove what happens when he's threatened
enough! Stop trying to boss people imperiously like a fucking queen on a throne when you're no
more than a dirty, forsaken beggar with a broken badge, just like the rest of us!"

All eyes in the room and on screen were popping out at the angry rant the shaking, sickly young man
had shouted at the monitor. Both directors and teams were reacting differently though.

"Buddy, that was uncalled for." Deeks growled, unimpressed. "True on many points, mind you. But not that polite, harsh, and should have been said differently. We're all stressed out to max, including Mosley. Piling on screams and insults isn't helping any, even if it feels good coming out."

"Marty! What kind of comeback is that?" Kensi asked her man, visibly scandalized by how her agency boss was treated by the worker from the other group. Which was strange since she'd never been the least little bit fond of Mosley in, like, ever.

"Hey! Let off him, woman!" Riley Davis griped angrily in defense of her colleague. "MacGyver may not be the most touchy-feely of all guys, but he's no brutish grunt either! If he says there's a bad chance of getting creamed-out in the method your boss wants done, I'd listen to him. Cuz, you know, out of everybody in this here meet, only him and Lund have any sorts of inkling what's going on inside Wolenczak's head. And I think trying the high-handed, adult-in-charge-of-kid tactic will in fact result in more deaths, and a refusal to help anybody outside his walls. And that's if he doesn't decide to actively gas everybody he can reach to make sure the threats are really dead this time around. Lobbing a nuke at you would be the least of your possible worries from this guy. His companies produce antibiotics and anti-venom to treat diseases and animal bites; that means the labs have the base toxins in hand to test their prototypes before mass production. He could just mass synthesize the poisons instead, and then what would you do against him?"

Sebastian voiced firmly "Miss Davis is correct on all counts. Doctor Wolenczak favors combat tactics that emphasize subtlety and discretion with geekishly technical twists. The use of corrosive acids, psychotropic pharmaceuticals and hidden knives basted in toxins figure prominently in his resume, not guns, bombs and vehicular manslaughter. He's more likely to find and call somebody in your entourage that's tired of your bitchy persona through a phantom VPN, then pay him off in Euros via PayPal out of a Micronesian Bank, to kill you at your desk by handing you a poisoned coffee while you're feeling big, powerful and unreachable. It isn't your meager security around whatever it is you call an 'enclave' that will stop him. Super Max prisons can barely hold idiotic animalesque detainees from committing atrocities or contacting the outside to give orders to their followers. Just how hermetical and secure do you think your communal space will be against his determined assault, once he figures out that it's by your orders that he's being forced into a court battle for his freedom?"

"And why would he know it's me who's responsible, agent Lund?" countered Mosley in a voice full of concentrated menace that promised immediate retribution even if he backed off.

Snorting in contempt for the woman's very obviously razor thin sliver of intellect and emotional stability, the New Orleans agent replied blithely, with as much audible and visible disrespect as he was capable of expressing: "Not much of a law graduate, are you? Lucas will know BECAUSE both Deeks and Gregorio will need to put your name and titles on all of our credentials, customs passes, affidavits, court documents, immigration tribunal briefs, request for an emergency meeting with the federal minister of national defense, et cetera and so on... Without the name of the director of the agency holding federal policing powers as the case's referring authority, the Canadians will not even let us pass the borderlines, let alone interfere in the lives of anybody inside, even under pretensions that we 'own him already' like a pet poodle that slipped his leash."

Mosley wasn't even given the chance to answer that broadside before Wilt Bozer acrimoniously slung verbal vitriol across her arguments and positions. "Yo, sister! By the way! Given what just happened to the country in the last week, and that you're both black and a woman, aren't you the least bit ashamed o' yo'self for trying to say aloud that the basic argument for making anybody do anything is that 'somebody owns them' like Trump and his barbarians tried to re-enslave us? Where
the fuck is your sense of self preservation, woman? Or your racial pride, dammit all! You wanna go around this shit-can again? Do it on your own time, not on ours, or the country's! We got badges to SAVE people, not to chain them to your war galley like the rowers in Rome!"

Clapping their thighs a few times, both Gregorio and Davis exclaimed together "Hear, hear!" with Riley adding nastily "You tell her some common sense, Bose! She's obviously deciding with something that's not under her hairdo!"

This virulent exchange brought a thunderclap of exclamation from Mathilda Webber who'd stayed silently observant until now, since there was no clear path ahead through the fog-of-war. Now there was. "People! That's not how we address colleagues from other agencies! And especially not their directorate! If anybody's gonna blast a director, it's gonna be me! And nobody better get in my way or you'll be bawling out for mercy before I even get my hands on you! Is the Standard Operating Procedure clear?"

"Yes ma'am!" was heard automatically from six people, with not a little fright in their tones. Matty the Hun was about to rampage and it wan't no time to be about in the field no more.

Putting on her best fake 'support for a colleague' smile of diplomatic blandness, Mathilda spoke in a tone and choice of words much more suited to the plush velvet-padded offices of the Capitol than field work in a war-torn country. It was just too bad that Shay Mosley was herself an adept liar, a consummate politician and rabid burn & sack barbarian in her own right that saw through the vapid polite façade on first contact. Not that Matty expected any differently since she'd had dealings with her counterpart often in the last seven years through her CIA and DXS functions.

"Now, Shay, let's not get on our war chariots just yet. I'm certain that doctor Wolenczak is just being a mite overly prudent due to his health and mobility issues. If we let him have the problem looked at in Vancouver, he'll certainly be much more amenable to relocating to one of his existing USA facilities to continue his excellent R&D work and business collaborations with all levels of government. With the Trumpists' White Christian Regency fallen to burning pieces before the planet's eyes just this morning, allowing a couple of weeks to pass can only make the country more stable, and more attractive on its own merits, without resorting to menace and force. You don't have the habit of international diplomatic nuances like we do, or the long experience at maneuvering actors of the planetary political scene to move while believing it's of their own volition. The DXS does those things as its daily routine, before we even consider the 'hard' problems to manually interfere with. Put your people in the capable hands of my team, and we'll see the young scientist quite literally BEG us to let him back in the country, just so he can tack his name on the reconstruction efforts to win the public kudos it would give him, along the nice juicy governmental supply & services contracts that come with them. Greed and desire are far better long term motivators than fear and pain. You were trained to know that as well as me."

Director Mosley seemed to think it over for a few minutes, all the while glaring vengefully towards Wilt Bozer as if she could incinerate the younger man through the monitor. After about five minutes of silence, she wheedled a request through the back door in the form of a legalistic argument. "As I recall, the DXS does not, in statutory fact, have signatory authority for any policing or customs actions undertaken by the US Federal government. Principally because you don't officially exist ANYWHERE in the fed's organigram, and will burn out your agents rather than admit you do physically exist. As you have done in the recent past, if my memory serves me correctly."

Smiling with all her teeth visible like a crocodile about to feast, Mathilda Webber replied in amused tones, having seen that one coming from a hundred miles off; "Of course, dear, you can still put your name on all their credentials, documents and court actions. My people will, afterall, be 'publicly' attached to your agency as externally contracted technical assistants for the duration, because of the
unforeseen shortage of internal manpower you are experiencing. Quite thoroughly understandable management method, under the current national crisis. You can even claim all the resulting credits and plaudits in public, in whatever congressional hearings, whenever they happen. Our agency will gladly cede all media time and limelight to your good people, so long as ours are consigned to the oblivion of the shadows where they dwell. You'll have the agreement letter on your desk in an hour, as per the standard National Intelligence Agency protocols in vigor. Anything else?"

Giving her own patently false smile of 'friendly acquiescence' to her counterpart, she shook her head negatively, then spelled out for her teams their new marching orders. "Alright, people! From now on, the DXS team will lead this circus show through its hoops and you follow that lead. Deeks, you're still the point man for us in it all. And I want that argumentative I talked about prepared anyways, to be filed as part of our work product in case we need it for the tribunals in Canada or the UEO. Bside, we need to put that in our agency archives so Congress can read what our options were, eventually, when we have a Congress again at some point. That's all on my end." she closed her position, quite determined to end this meet.

"Same here for DXS," Matty confirmed. "If anything urgent comes up, email us both together or wait until tomorrow morning when we have another vid-meet to discuss how first contact went. We'll set up the regular vidphone report schedule at that moment, depending on how things are with the principal asset in the case."

A few minimalist salutations later and the viewscreen was blacked-out, going on stand-by but not inert yet as the minimal 15 minute delay for sleep-mode hadn't passed.

Emitting loud sighs of released stress and angst, the two NCIS lawyers gathered their work satchels and papers to a quiet table near the door to the SCIFF and the cockpit beyond. It was a much better place for intellectually demanding legal paperwork than the high-traffic area near the kitchen door. Riley would join the pair to plug them into the plane's internal secured network and servers, just as soon as she had disconnected her phone from the conference monitor, thus closing the system down. As she removed the set's attached wires and spooled them back to stow into the hardware drawer of the built-in cabinetry unit under the wall-mounted screen, she never paid attention to the automated network pop-up that showed the statistics of the lines, user ID's, frequencies, bandwidth and time online used.

If she had, she would have seen that the external signals were passing at 98.68% of maximal bandwidth and, maybe she would have checked further. Or she would have assumed the minuscule slow-down was due to so many signal towers and Internex nodes being damaged or unmanned from the civil war going on that she would not have looked further. Since she had actually expected a slow-down worse than 5% until dinner when she expected an even worse drop as more Internex signal repeaters and nodes would be destroyed across the USA, it probably wouldn't have worried her anyways. As it was, she didn't see the data pop-up, and so she would never even ask.

They would all have reason to cry for this soon enough.

{ SQ } --- { } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; 14:57pm
Western America; 11:57am

Back in his suite of the Daleminton Hotel, the teenager concerned by all this was still seated on the wooden chest at the foot of his bed. He had stretched out his aching legs towards the glowing wood stove, hoping that the waves of gentle warmth would soothe his muscles and tendons a bit. His eyes were closed, allowing him to concentrate on the events happening so far away south, in Los Angeles, where people thought they had the right, the authority even, to decide for his life.
They were wrong, of course. Dead wrong.

Opening his eyes to behold the soft noon-time sunlight streaming in peacefully by the slightly ajar patio doors alongside some fresh pine scented mountain air, the teenager released his deep hold over the neuroplexic network. Instantly he felt a tension leave his neck, ears, eyes and temples, as the energy circulating around the implants dissipated through his body, merging harmlessly with his nervous system just as the natural electro-chemical signals did. Sighing a deep exhale, Lucas turned his flint blue eyes, back to their normal dark color now, towards the Internex monitor hung on the wall above the wooden service counter. The unit's screen was a shiny black, inert as it was now disconnected. He used his reflection in the matte surface as an anchor to concentrate as he regulated his breathing during his period of deep thought.

Because of the massive amounts of information gathered by the neural interface during its use, it was actually impractical to use 'on the fly' so to speak. The chance of data overload was real, even for him, and the risk of ignoring minute details of great relevance was even worse. This was especially consequent when reading the emotions and patterns of a living entity, and downright dangerous when trying to profile many humans in one go. Like in a classroom setting, it was better to concentrate on the room and people, trusting that books and recordings were available for revision later on in a calmer, isolated setting.

As things were, Lucas had been awake for an hour before the phone rang, a nasty nightmare having roused him many hours earlier than planned. That shortened restless sleep cycle hadn't improved either his health or his cold, angry mood from the day before, you could be sure of that. Immediately upon waking, he got a small cappuccino and muffin to fill the hole in his gut, then got to the business of hacking through the systems of the two organizations that wanted to send him representatives. Despite the fact that Trump's little dog & pony show in DC was going on, the teen had no desire to waste his time on it; the 6:00pm news would tell him the highlights, he didn't need the details. No, what he needed was more personal information on the coming envoys, especially anything classified or hidden like their mission goals and what methods they were expected to employ.

Since the NCIS was a federal policing agency overseeing the Navy, their systems should have been well defended but, thanks to Trump's sacking of their HQ at the Navy Yard, the servers and intranet were in a state of wild fluctuation that allowed easy access for his neuroplexic probe. It took barely fifteen minutes to punch through, find and harvest everything he needed about the New Orleans and Los Angeles regional offices, their crews, and then ferret out the elusive Shay Mosley's personal files.

The DXS was a different animal altogether; their servers were pristine, stable, and somebody (a certain Ms Davis perhaps?) had been updating their firewalls, including a makeshift patch to keep his Bios-OS update hijacker from locking on to their firmware ports. Whomever had done the job had come to the conclusion that they couldn't fight the virulent program once installed, since it was too close in code & nature to the original manufacturer's own version. Therefore, they decided to run a sweep & forbid routine to block his fake-patch from actually entering the system to contaminate it. Basic but effective, yes, until he decided to blunt-force his way through by throwing all the 4 million users/passwords he had collected from the defunct CIA server in Texas across half the 150,000 lines the DXS HQ had coming in through a dedicated fiber optics telecom emulation hub. And wasn't that funny, seeing just how much 'illegal surveillance' this phantom fed agency was doing on absolutely everybody, going so far as to build a fraudulent telecom service & control hub, right in the heart of metropolitan Los Angeles. So much for Net Neutrality laws indeed. From the moment he activated his auto-ping app, it was a simple game of patience which lasted barely three minutes before he had several hundred still-valid passwords to get inside and roam at his devious little heart's content.

He was busily navigating his way through the DXS intranet, mapping the place and setting up
several phantom back-doors by using the CIA's own built-in 'agency remote management' toolkit when he detected the reception of an incoming line with a number he had tagged for active GPS tracking & wiretapping through his bot-net. Riley Davis was calling home to set up a 3-way conference right after Trump's mess had exploded in his face. Lucas was able to see the entire first conference they had, even though they thought they were secure on all lines. Technically, they were secure since he hadn't hacked any of their phone lines; he was already inside DXS HQ, looking over their director's shoulder via her own security cameras in her OPS room. Small difference in terms of law and morality, but eh, it was those kinds of details that won wars.

Lucas was surprised by some of what he witnessed. Miss Davis, MacGyver and agent Lund had good opinions of his technological and medical capacities, rather flatteringly so in fact, but they critically underestimated him nonetheless. The other members of their teams had opinions based on gossip, the WAC's website, Stanford student records, and their own limited views of reality.

Snort! - The usual, for his life. Disdained and scorned even when they needed him.

Or rather, they needed his resources, not him per se.

Before the first conference had disconnected, he had traced and penetrated the servers in the DXS plane and the NCIS – LA enclave, setting back-doors and his customized remote management system to run invisibly in the background. Then he quickly hacked through the MD-11C refit's internal systems until he could see through the comms and security devices located throughout the vehicle. That allowed him to witness the private discussions the two field teams had about his person, his usefulness, and how they should approach him for first contact. Then they decided to call him to see if he was still minimally interested in a face-to-face meeting in Vancouver.

What a fucking joke these people were!

The USA was ablaze and yet, they still thought with their badges and big honking guns!

Lucas smiled a nasty crooked half-smirk as he remembered how easy it had been to play the blond numskull kid that got yanked out of deep sleep by the phone ring, falling besides the bed in his rush to find the remote to activate the screen. Morons! As if someone with his injuries would ever sleep without cellphone, remote controller and panic button, right there under his pillow, or inside the built-in shelving unit that composed the bed's massive all-in-one wooden headboard and nightstands. Not to mention that voice control was standard on all regulation Internex monitors sold to public accommodations and offices; only the domestic models had VC optional. All Lucas had to do was mess up his bed sheets, sit himself on the ground out of view, and keep the monitor blacked out until he was ready. Through the neural interface, he saw them call and was able to con them easily with his amateurish rendition of a school play pratfall. Since all they saw was a poor, much maligned little kid who was weak and easily victimizable, not a single one saw through the transparent ruse.

As their copilot had said sarcastically: "Tradecraft obviously isn't a prerequisite of the job anymore."

Imbeciles, the lot of them.

Even the supposed 'geniuses' spread across their teams were operating under skewed paradigms, fallacies and bigotries that blinded them to the true reality of the person they were courting for favors.

Then, the idiots had the gall to try and negotiate with him for safety, livable space and usage of his resources while DARING to imply that they would be LOYAL to him, all the while their very intention was to get close to him just enough to either convince him, or kidnap him, but never to be loyal. Not that the boy would ever be stupid enough to trust pure strangers on first contact like that! Just how inexperienced at life did they think him to be?
Well, the verbal joust with Lund had been amusing, for all of one minute, but that was about it.

Then they closed the signal and called their two HQ's, which, of course, Lucas had again secretly watched since he needed to know what the true intentions of all parties were in this mess. And wasn't that an eye opener as to WHY exactly the country had fallen in the toilet, pushed by a geriatric religious fool, then flushed by an angry adolescent's viciously driven desire for safety and freedom. Even with criminals and madmen running around killing people freely, and fearlessly, outside her thinly built edifice, the newly self-elevated director of NCIS was busy politicking for a higher station in life and the future government. That black furred bitch Mosley really was something... The USA were burning to the ground at her feet, yet here she was, in a fucking pissing contest with the sister-agency, trying to lift her leg to mark her patch like a she-dog running between fence poles around a property she'd never visited before. And the backstabbing stunted dolt on the other line just let her do without even a wink of protest, just as long as she wasn't publicly accountable for whatever was done to Lucas to make him docile and helpful. And wasn't THAT little understatement a declaration of war all on its own!

**THESE** were the people who were supposed to lead the reconstruction efforts?

**THESE** were supposed to be the leaders of a new era of honesty, civility and social harmony?

In which bloody faerie tale was that happening?

Were the dragons here yet? Cuz, you know, he always liked those in a fantasy story.

Pursing his lips in deeper thought, Lucas idly analyzed the NCIS director's somewhat expected tactic of invoking the NAC charter clauses on 'extinction-level events' in court. The partially rational, but visibly mostly emotional, appeal to the Canadian and UEO authorities had a very thin chance of working, so thin in fact that it didn't worry him. Honestly, the woman had a better chance of obtaining custody over his person by proving that Trump and the White Christian Regency were destroyed irrevocably, thusly no longer a threat to his life, than by pulling at the heartstrings of countries that had been spat on by the USA for the last four years.

Massaging the nape of his neck to relieve a kink, the youth tried to drag what he remembered of NATO's successor from the darker recesses of his memory. Bah! What little he did remember was mostly about the architecture of security clearance levels in their servers, how the World Bank processed their transactions on a different schedule and accounting methodology than the UEO had chosen to employ. An idiocy that made his life harder as main programmer for that particular system, since he had to double everything he did to accommodate them alongside of the regular UEO transactions, which 84% of the planet had standardized. But the NAC was primarily a military defense pact, not a civilian trade zone, therefore they had insisted that having a system that was not only segregated from the regular Internex, but also programmed differently, would increase security.

In theory, the type of system could have done exactly what was expected. Against menial little skript kiddies at the bottom of the ladder. For old pros like Lucas, it just meant a few more hours of patience while automated number crunching by his bot-net got done, letting him free to sleep, eat, or go out of the apartment for a brake from being connected. The North American Confederation deciders had the right idea, and the right method, but they had simply run afoul of exactly the kind of person their system wasn't designed to repel, let alone handle. Not to mention that nobody on Earth had functional, provenly operational, neuroplexic systems & hubs in the field as he did, and certainly no defenses against this type of enhanced cybernetic processing power. That, plus the fact the guy hacking them had helped to build not only the programs and safety regulations users had to follow, Lucas had also been the person who designed and validated the concepts for many of the hardware parts put into the servers and nodes all over the NAC alliance over the last two years.
Ah, betrayal; the coldest, cruelest of all weapons...

Then again, if the World's governments hadn't tried to betray him first by shamefully letting Trump and his nightmarish sect of paladins, crusaders and inquisitors loose on the planet, he would have held his secrets all the way to his grave. Unfortunately for them though, this particular teenager was a rather nasty, spiteful, and quite vengeful little bastard, so he would now be using every secret he owned to make good on his threats of retaliation against those that tried to harm him. Starting with the USA and every church or faith organization they spawned, then extending it to all international connections or allies these depraved cesspits of religious toxicity had financed.

But back to immediate concerns, namely a certain Shay Mosley whose time on this Earth seemed to be coming to a close. Or maybe not? Warfare was a cold, unfeeling business, and the winners who walked out at the end were often lesser, reduced in humanity compared to what they had been going in. Wasn't there an old proverb that stated "War makes debased beasts of all who partake, with only the dead having still a parcel of their humanity left" or something similar? Taking that warning to heart, Lucas understood that he had to tread carefully, as he had already committed several acts of international war himself, even if he were just a 'mere civilian child' in the eyes of the laws and governments. He was now in reality a veteran of the trenches, physically as well as cybernetically, considering just how physical and real the consequences of his cascading hack-wave had been. He was most assuredly responsible for the tens of millions of deaths that would occur in direct consequence of tens of thousands of churches and organizations going bankrupt, plus the military's budget getting frozen. When the families, schools, orphanages, hospices, and other faith-linked systems all imploded catastrophically and the people each went their own ways, mostly to their quick merciless deaths in the depths of winter's relentless storms, it would be on his soul that the fault rested. Well, him and few besides him, since the white anglo-saxon christians had pushed beyond all good taste, morality, legality or basal humanity. They targeted him personally, calling him out in public TV programs, so they could share the defender's podium with him, when the time for tribunals came.

And it would continue like that, in the same manner, for as long as he was ready to pay the price for his freedom and safety.

Pay with the livelihood, welfare, health and lives of others, just as his parents, schools, churches and national governments had showed him to do since he was born. They bred, broke and tamed him specifically to create a living, thinking, autonomous weapon that could infiltrate enemy societies and trigger once inside, to unleash multi-faceted chaos. They had, knowingly or not, pursued the research and depravities of his great-grand-father Franklin Henry Wise into naturalism, eugenics and the elaboration of the ubermensch, the super-soldier iconic of White European creed and faith. They almost made it, too. Except that what he got mentally was never matched physically, and only a blind fool would call him 'super'. He was competent to the point of being genial in multiple domains of sciences and technology, but not by any stretch of the imagination was he 'super' at anything.

But the people coming for him didn't know that.

And Mosley, ensconced deeply in her protected enclave didn't either, nor would she care for such minor details. No, what the woman wanted was an egghead, a squint, a geek to shame all geeks into taking lessons in weirdness from him, but she wasn't looking for a super soldier or some hyper-physical brute to punch through cement walls. What she wanted was exactly what Lucas had in vast stores; intellect, raw processing power, intuition, large-picture perspective but without sacrificing the small-picture perspective as most macro-managers did... She really wanted a strategist or a logistician, not a tactician as she had two dozen of those already. She needed someone to manage the daily admin grind of her enclaves and human resources so she could be free to handle the politics and military tactics herself, as she preferred.
Lucas could understand her stance; but she'd never get anything from him for free, let alone by making threats at his freedom or health. "Whelp... there went that option..." the teen whispered softly as he flexed and rotated his ankles one after the other in a gentle therapy exercise to keep them from cramping. Getting off the wooden chest, he closed the patio doors, locking them tightly, then slowly walked to the kitchen to fetch some solid food for his first real meal of the day. He wouldn't be going back to sleep until evening anyways, not with all these threats flitting around his outer perimeter.

As he took out the frozen breakfast foods he had saved from the buffet cart two days ago, he thought about the options available to him. How could he control the war, force the combatants to fight on his terrain, in those periods, and with only those terms he chose? How could he – impose – conditions on the battle to come without it backfiring dramatically in his face? Sun Tzu had stated that "To win the war, you must always impose on your enemy terrains, weather, daytime, and methods of survival that were as foreign to his troops as could be, to sap their strength and resilience before the fighting even starts. Only then do you hit most unconventionally, from as many positions and weird angles as your own troops can manage. If you know your enemy as well or better than your own allies, you will be victorious, in both the manipulations and the fight." The iconic Art of War was an old text indeed, but sage advice from a man who had written THE actual book about warfare that was still taught in military schools all over the world. Lucas had learned to read, write and speak Mandarin at age 11 during his first long hospitalization, just as he began to attend Stanford's classes remotely, by using the everlasting text. His tutor, back then, happened to be a retired elderly doctor who had migrated from China in the early 1970's. He had practiced medicine at the same Stanford hospital they were being cared for, until his retirement due to terminal colon cancer. The man had insisted that Lucas learn his native language from a source that would also offer him inspiration on how to face the hardships and violence inflicted on him by his parents, as the man had known such people in his own family. The old man died the year after, but was remembered kindly, just as his teachings were well valued.

Damn. Sun Tzu was right - as always - but how to apply his wisdom in this case?

Problem One; Shay Mosley was angling to bring him to the defunct USA so she could exploit him without any oversight or constraints, other than what her 'owned' minions would tolerate.

Solution One; not go to the USA, under any circumstance. Find another confederation, country or territory to be sheltered by their leading authorities, but in a way that keeps him autonomous.

Problem Two; Many groups wanted to exploit or enslave him, up to and including pillaging his existing companies, research projects and personal possessions. The basal reasons for such desires were multiple, but irrelevant to the result from his viewpoint. They were all thieving, rioting barbarians which he had to repel.

Solution Two; preemptively approach people or institutions in positions of power over the planetary economy to make first-move deals with them, thus sheltering his holdings and companies under their desire to see the deals follow through. When greed is the motivator, people will usually be very stable, reliable and predictable in their decisional processes. The corporate bosses and elected ministers of finance in each country also have this visceral allergy to losing money, or seeing profit walk to the other country. These simple psycho-social mechanisms could be manipulated easily towards his own goals, since he was intimately acquainted with them, being a global industrialist himself.

Problem Three; his physical safety was in immediate jeopardy.

Solution Three; whomever he made a deal with to shelter his business and moneys, he would need to
hold his own armed forces separately and ready to deploy in his own defense. That meant of course that he had to complete and secure his stranglehold over the cybernetic side of banking, then acquire control over the atmospheric recycling towers and, if possible at all, the orbital anti-ICBM stations. Once he made it abundantly clear that stealing from him would be met by 'The Wrath of Heavens', then he could look for para-military freelancers to employ. These would then accept his payments without betraying him since his capacity to destroy an entire country would be well established, and only a few insane defectives would ever challenge him then. You only betray people who can't reach far enough to touch & hurt you, or your loved ones. Once his reach and willingness were proven, he would have peace and safety.

Synthesis; he needed to move his cash reserves and property titles to a neutral, unshakable nation who would resist all attempts at political coercion less damaging or physical than an actual full-scale military attack on its borders. Furthermore, he needed to hire, train up, and deploy at the very least one medium sized guerrilla team. Said people needed to have capacities and effectiveness similar to the DXS field units to maintain his safety, primarily by sending this armed high-impact team against the origin of the threat to exterminate it, preemptively if possible.

Conclusion; he needed a place that was safe, hard to reach, harder to breach, offered qualified medical support up to his standards, and was built with an energetic system sufficient to support his neuroplexic hub and fabrication devices. This installation was to be necessary and important enough for the bigwigs of the planet to keep it safely functional without any efforts on his part, as he already had a lot on his plate. But, it also needed to have built-in direct-action military & weaponized capacity on call so he could defend his person locally, regardless of any country or government’s preferences.

Realization; a deliciously cruel irony. He could simply be a good son who obeys daddy and go rot right where his felonious parent wanted to drop him. The UEO's much vaunted flagship, the SeaQuest.

Rationale; the ship was a hugely spacious environment, well appointed to support civil life for an originally military designed boat. It boasted world-class medical facilities with adjunct research labs & personnel that would have Lucas engaging colleagues intellectually instead of despairing because he was surrounded by nothing but damned grunts. The ship carried several varieties of weapons, enough of each to scare away a full battle group all on its own. The cold fusion generator could power everything he would bring, buy or design on the way. Plus, the ship's latest upgrades included a slew of cybernetics that Lucas was intimately acquainted with like the holographic consoles, the biometric identification apps, the fourth gen updates to the PAL network and the life support emergency self-calibration apps that guaranteed that any spills or leaks in the labs or aqua-tubes would be isolated and purged in seconds.

Again, betrayal was such a cold, calculated weapon to wield, in expert hands like his...

"Yes", the teenager thought with a growing smile as his Sunday brunch was slowly heating on the gas hobs, "I think my last doctor said something about taking a little sea cruise vacation to get some fresh air and take my poor, weary mind off my many legal problems. And I have just the travel agency to resolve my problems in my virtual rolodex. Surely, the World Bank's governor wouldn't balk at giving an old friend such as little ol'e me a helping hand, wouldn't he? I'm certain he can arrange a quick conference call with the appropriate agencies and authorities to make it all happen, neatly and cleanly, far faster than I would. And without me needing to waste some of my rare and valuable sleep time."

Smiling genuinely for the first time in over a week, the adolescent took a chunk of french toast right out of the skillet where it was slowly sizzling up to good warmth, chewing it with gusto. Strangely
enough, his appetite was coming back with a vengeance. Funny, since he was cogitating vengeance...

Then another cruel irony hit him fully, striking his mind with enough force to make him lean on the metal safety handlebar on the front of the range-oven. A deep, loud, and clearly slightly unhinged laughter of evil glee erupted unbidden from the depths of his sickly, injured heart. He had just remembered that his much beloved parents had both been arrested and ferried to the SeaQuest, at the express behest of a certain admiral William Allard Boyd Noyce who had been in a bloody boiling rage from the unintelligent name-dropping his father had tried to intimidate his son with. The fact he had told people like the criminal lieutenant Denalt that what he did was part of a nudge-nudge deal with Noyce, and thusly no legal repercussions would happen, had probably also given the admiral some fresh new bilious ulcers for his collection. And most of the crew being internationally selected, it was quite probable that a large number of them and their countries would have screamed 'bloody murder' of outrage and shame at being associated – even accidentally – with such a deplorable turpitude. This too would have worsened Noyce's day, especially since it would come borne by diplomats who would insist on stopping by Andrea Dre's office to make certain she knew and was doing something about it.

Laughing harshly again at the sheer scruptiously evil irony of the mess, Lucas asked aloud to his crackling bacon slices, as if they would answer him somehow; "Surely the UEO and other governments wouldn't be so cruel as to refuse a poor, abandoned and neglected child like my damaged, desperate, self a much needed reunion with my own birth parents? Surely the planet learned its lesson after Trump's self-inflicted debacle a few years back? I mean, they're no good and probably criminals to boot, but they're all the parents I got. That has to count for something? Right?"
The bacon never answered him, despite all its greasy sizzling noises, but that wasn't the point at that time.

"Mwu Ah Ah Ah!" the adolescent exploded in malevolent hilarity.

Transferring his foodstuffs off the oven and into a beige ceramic plate decorated with forestry motifs and the Daleminton logo, the boy shoved a rasher of bacon in his mouth as he shut the gas, wiped the surface mostly clean, then made his way to the glass dining table where the condiments and a full thermal tankard of holy Java juice were waiting for him. The smile he wore on his young, angular face as he ate and drank his full-sized copious brunch had nothing nice to it, not in anybody's imagination.

Eghellum Falls

(Imperial March – Star Wars)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 16:00pm
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 13:00pm
White House; Oval Office
Washington DC, Maryland, USA

Sitting at his massive custom-built gothic wooden desk, the Papal Lord, Amerikus the First (and only), gazed most balefully upon the three computer screens that showed him the state of his personal, familial and corporate holdings across the vastness of planet Earth.

A big fat 'ZERO' that could be written on the eraser stub of a lead pencil.

It was all gone. Absolutely everything his grand-father, his father, himself and his two sons along
with Jared had worked on for over a century of totaled history, had all completely vanished into the ether of the Hell-pit that was the Internex. Not stolen, not transferred, not under limited blocks like the municipal budgets, nor put in judicial escrow like the US federal appropriations accounts.

Nope. Just gone.

Someone had vaporized over FOUR BILLIONS in moneys, assets, holdings, investments, brand names, property titles and even their bloody passports, social security accounts, driver's licenses, school diplomas, EVERYTHING!!!!!!

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, the Papal Lord swiveled the massive custom-built bishop's throne to face towards the conference sized Internex monitor, pushing a small button on his armrest as he did. The TV sound rose until it was clearly audible, even over the din of panicking staffers occasionally filtrating through the thinner portions of the walls and securely locked doors.

Why did he bother looking, again?

Firstly, there wasn't any positive coverage of him or his projects anymore. Even just friendly coverage would do fine, but that was asking too much. NO. The best he could find were channels too busy showing, and commenting, the massive racial and religious riots in progress, or the other grave problem that struck the nation, the spontaneous and fatally violent USA Youth Rebellion of 2020 as it had been dubbed by some 'imaginative' media type.

"Ah, fuck it all to Hell and back!" the Papal Lord exclaimed, as he surfed channels.

When CNN wasn't showing swarming hordes of slave-spawns burning down police stations with the cops inside, it was his 'reliable old friends' at Fox News that showed the empty vandalized schools, their snowy grounds strewn with the corpses of dead personnel, all still wearing their antiquated christian simile-monastic clothing. The news anchor very unhelpfully insisted on the fact that all these murders and rebellions were "The doings of scared, desperate, Pure and True white american boys and girls, scared for their virtue, health and lives at the hands of Trumpist ecclesiastes let loose of any controls. None may blame them for defending against such slovenly, murderous pedophiles".

"Bleh! So much for honest and fair reporting from Fox News Network and associates." the failed religious tyrant griped aloud to the empty room as he realized that even the baggage-boys were openly rebelling against his self-hyping, smack-talking style of bombast, hyperbole and systematically ignoring reality twice at every breath he took. Apparently, even the die-hard conservatives wanted some sorts of minimal adult behavior, stability, reliability, honesty and, you know... human decency and mercy...

Well, they weren't getting none of any of that! The country's population was collectively gleefully swirling around the piss-pot's drain pipe, and enjoying themselves at it, too! So much for asking HIM and the Papal Conclave, the SCOTUS and Congress for adult behavior and decency. Served them right!

Shutting off the useless piece of techno-crap, the 74 year old wannabe emperor turned back to his desk, wandering what was happening to his wives, sons and daughters in their sheltered retreat, out of the country. Thankfully, he had had the foresight to remove them from the conflagration zone before the holiday season, planning to keep them away until past the confirmation ceremony and the public revelation of the Reborn Grand Crusade. Now, they were seeing this on their TV's, reading it on the Internex feeds, and he wasn't at hand to spin & weave the story he wanted them to swallow and live by.

They would make their own opinions without him!
A shudder of debilitating fright traversed him at the thought. His own women and children, autonomous, independent, no longer bound by his authoritative God-endowed Will and Rod... They would finally be able to see and hear things that should never be spoken or shown, specifically because they went against his narrative, his lies and hyperbolic bombast, flowing contrary to his long decades of fraud, crime and abuses of trust. And he couldn't convince them otherwise. He couldn't even intimidate them or threaten to jail them anymore, although he'd only just now thought of that ultimate shame as a plausible, acceptable last option rather than tolerate rebels inside his home.

Because the FBI and all forms of federal policing were dead, dying, or had run off in fear for their lives, nobody was present to explain to the Exalted President of the Christian Nation of America that his thought patterns were actually a known profile of criminal insanity. He was slowly going down a psychological regressive spiral of clinical depression, self-loathing, doubts about the future, doubts about his own worth, finally seeing his complete loss of all power over others in his job. All this culminating in the death knell that even his family was now disabused about his true nature, which he couldn't hide anymore, thus causing him a catastrophic dose of reality, fear, shame and powerlessness.

The FBI's specialized 'Behavior Analysis Unit' in Quantico would have qualified him as a sociopathic, psychopathic, narcissistic, attention-addicted, media-addicted, domestic tyrant, charismatic cult tyrant who had finally devolved in the most statistically reoccurring end for such a persona: the family annihilator. The very common, usual even, brutish religious sectarian fanatic who believes that his spouse and kids should only live by his will, and under his rule, or they should die. Of course, the excuse they all said was that the murderous deaths were actually 'Inquisitory Sanctions' needed SUPPOSEDLY so they could still be pure enough to be allowed into Heaven, rather than live long enough, and far enough away from the tyrant, to sully their souls and be condemned to Hell. Better they die in cleansing pains, as Holy Martyrs for Christ, than to be left alive as heathens that proved with every breath they took that the tyrant had never been that frightful, or truly powerful, no matter what Divine Might he arrogated for himself in his delusions.

Well, since the BAU had all been shot dead in the gunfight against the Grand Crusade Army soldiers that came to arrest them for public executions under Father Bleddings' unholy offices, nobody would be bothering the old crone in his delusions of self-righteous heavenly almight. No, all the feds inside Washington DC, in service or on vacation, had all been rounded up in jail or got killed in fights. The country had lost a lot of 'good, pure white men' that way, but since they opposed the Cleansing and the Crusade, that made them race traitors like Seely Booth, so their deaths were justified under the Inquisition of the Faith. Amen.

At 13:12pm, the tall heavy man was sitting in his large throne, idly fiddling with the solid silver ring bearing the depiction of Eghellum, the newly minted icon of America's Guiding Light under the will of Jesus, their God and Savior. The small metallic object rolled in the palm of his left hand, as he watched the light from the viking styled fire pot reflect on the deeply sculpted surface, making the eagle design's colors resplend even more. Setting his forearm on the armrest of his throne, the old man leaned back into the deep azure cushions, feeling the full weight of his age, history and failures crushing him relentlessly. Leaning his head backwards so he could gaze pensively at the ornate ceiling frescoes that had been painted over the 225 years of the building's existence, he felt another shudder of fear and despondency pass through him. He closed his tired eyes, just for a few minutes, to stave off the migraine that he could feel forming.

A short soft 'pffffiiittt' noise was heard through the room, followed by the distinctive loud sound of metal traumatically warping and glass exploding to shards. The high powered, high velocity X-25bb (Experimental 25mm bursting bolt) new-age tungsten round punched through the steel shutters.
covering the french doors leading to the cement dais above the Roseanic Chapel. The shock-wave of its passage exploded all of the decorative doors' glass panes, ending its course right inside the thorax of the Papal Lord. Right through the sternum, inside his coronary muscle mass.

By reflex action, his whole body spasmed, the colored sigil ring tumbling out of his hand, bouncing and spinning on the hard wood floors until it came to rest against the wooden desk's thick base.

Then the projectile exploded.

Loudly.

And spectacularly messily.

Such a disgusting mess of flesh and blood, 'fountaining' all around like a giant water balloon filled with dye, for such a small rocket-sustained projectile. Only 25mm diameter by 175mm long, the bolt of tungsten-alloy was 5mm thick all around, with a 15mm by 75mm explosive payload and the rest was the solid propellant for the second stage of trajectory. The initial shooting cordite shell was made of ordinary brass that stayed in the tripod-mounted rifle, getting ejected as the shot left the barrel.

It was an experimental prototype from the US Navy arsenal in Mobile, Alabama, that had been stolen last year from a contractor's R&D labs by his civilian employee, a young skinhead idiot who wanted to become part of the same fanatic white-power militia as his brothers and cousins. It had been recovered during a heavy shoot-out, in that same city, with the NCIS – Major Response Team based in the Washington DC Navy Yard, just a few city blocks away from the White House. When the Crusaders breached the NCIS HQ Saturday morning, to captured or assassinate everyone they could see, they missed somebody who was out in the city on his off time.

They should have looked harder, and beyond the building. They failed their mission.

Getting that bloody gutsy mess out of the wood furniture, velvet upholstery and wood floors, would take a lot of effort. Not that anybody would care to do the job. There wouldn't be anybody left to give a damn passed sundown, anyways. In the following 90 minutes, each isolated person that could be seen or scanned by the rifle's powerful hybrid scope was taken out by a single shot to center-mass. Then those in pairs were targeted, the bolt programmed to air-burst next to the targets, which were now aimed at face level for maximum chance of maiming permanently and grievously, in case they didn't die from shrapnel penetration or bleeding out.

The White House was an old building, nearly 225 years old in some parts. The construction techniques used in the walls had never been conceived to resist miniaturized ballistic projectile artillery shot from some 2,500 yards away, which was only half the effective range the weapon could reach. Even though the gunner had placed himself on the rear side of the building to maximize his chances against his primary objective, the building's other sectors were nowhere near reinforced enough to stop this weapon's slugs from going through the venerable brick and wood planking walls.

It was a slow, miserable and lonely job, but this man was gonna get it done.

He did. It was done, at long last.

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When 40 shots had left the massive team-portable light artillery, the weapon became silent. All the experimental ammunition available for it had been spent wisely, in dispassionate but honorable service of the laws and morality of a dead nation, carrying almost 90% kill ratio in total.

The man carefully shuttered the scope's flaps then affixed the red muzzle plug that signified the
weapon was empty and secured, ready for transport to another job. The damned gun was twice heavier than a Ma Deuce 1933 Cal.50 BMG but still manageable by a single man, if you took the bloody long 12 foot barrel assembly and huge telescope off to move it in three separate segments.

The tripod itself was the same regular model used by USMC gunners since Vietnam and needed a trip for itself, just like the box of 40 rounds, weighing three pounds each, had been heavy enough to warrant its own lonely walk.

It had taken an hour of slow back & forth to pull out of the armor-plated secured 'classified evidence' storage lockers under the NCIS annex where the agency's geek squad held court amongst their servers, hubs and wireless antennae. Very few people knew that weapon was still being held, even though the investigation had been closed by lack of – living – suspects to drag before a judge. Someone intimately linked to the conception and preparations for the 'Noah's Ark' protocols had decided to waylay the ultra-modern weapon in case killing off the nation's leadership became a critical necessity for their survival. The idea had been valid and quite clairvoyant, as events in the last 72 hours had just showed.

But the mission had failed. He was too late.

Every person he loved was dead, and everything he cared for of the country was dead, corrupted or being sold off on the Tor sites, in the deep recesses of the Dark Web where he was normally so at ease, navigating amongst his own geeky kindred spirits.

No more. The web no longer offered solace for him. The intricate currents of codes, data and comportment patterns that had fed his rich, vivacious mind for decades no longer bore life or joy for him. Because he was alone. Because he had nothing left to fight for. Because nothing was waiting for him at home, when he emerged victorious from another cybernetic war against crime and depravity, or returned from the field stinking of sewage and plant sap from recovering a victim's body.

Delilah and the twins were dead. Killed by the crusaders at Bethesda hospital when they came to arrest those they claimed were slave-spawns, race-traitors or heathens. Bless her soul, Delilah had tried, really she had, to keep herself and the twins hidden in a supply closet, deep in the examination room they had been waiting in to be seen by the pediatrician. It didn't work. The crusaders had come with a scanning technician who was stalking the floors with an infrared visor and parabolic microphone to spot the nooks and crannies that usually got passed over during quick smash & grab's of the sort. They saw Delilah, she used her NSA sidearm to kill the tech and two crusaders, but that signed the death warrants of her and the babies. Not that they would have lived any longer.

Timothy McGee didn't want to think on what he had learned, through his contacts in the Dark Web and across the military scuttlebutt, about what the fate reserved to children under age ten captured alive was destined to be. The Bratva. The Russian mob. Slavery, sexual at first while the children were young and easy to break, then just dumb manual labor when they were bigger. Many wouldn't survive passed the first month of captivity, the russians having a 'thing' for snuff-fucking their juvenile victims. It was an unbearably cretinous, unforgivable, peasant superstition that if you killed the young virginal child while he was sucking your cock, you would absorb their life-force to fight disease, injury and old age. It was supposed to work better if you destroyed the child's virginity by sodomy so brutally that it tore and bled from the anus, then was forced to clean your member with its mouth, at which point you slit it's throat and keep it in position until final death occurred. The old insanity purported that at the moment of fatality, the infant's 'energy' passed from its orifice into the orifice of the penetrative member, just like plugging an appliance into a wall socket for electricity to charge reusable batteries.

"Uneducated, illiterate, iconoclastic, ill-aborted spawns of disease-bearing wild whores rutting in a
Finally done with his last tasks, Tim looked around the sniper's nest he had created. It was just like The Boss had taught him; simple, discrete, elevated but not the last floor as that would leave him exposed to satellites or drones that 'see' through the roofing material. Hence, like a fringe-kook, the good old aluminum foil that served as wallpaper, including the ceiling, and under the layer of transparent plastic sheeting that served as floor cover. Better paranoid than found out, especially with what he had planned at the time. The luxury building had a good security system and manned front desk, but the underground garage was watched only via a set of fixed-mount cameras that Timmy had hacked and looped through a continuous sequence without really paying attention, or trying hard at all, in fact. In better times, he would have been kind to them, warning them of the blind angles then offering to refer a friend who worked on upgrading such flaws. No more.

Taking out an old stainless steel flask embossed with the USMC logo that had seen better epochs than today, even whence it was used in the heart of war field trenches, he saluted empty air, keeping his eyes closed as he knew what came next. He didn't think anybody in the White House would be that quick to hunt down the sniper who wiped out the defective bastards that served them as leaders and first tier minions. But, you could never know when a zealot would decide to come out of his comfortable hidey-hole to continue the Holy Cause all by his lonesome.

Case in point; himself.

Lifting the uncapped flask to his lips, he drank the alkaline fluid in the slow methodical manner that had characterized all of his actions during his life, no matter that it was a subtle, incurable poison of Abby Sciutto's making that was his fatidic last toast. She had prepared this for each of them, as part of the 'Last Bastion' Rules put in place by Gibbs when director Sheppard had started participating in the 'Noah's Ark' protocols. At least Abby was safe in England, working in a charity with homeless kids, away from this violence and bloodshed. Tony was with his daughter and father, in Venice, Italy, because Senior had a genuine business going these days. Something about wanting a tangible asset to protect his grand-daughter with, just in case. They and Timothy were the last survivors or NCIS central HQ, so to speak. He wouldn't be with them much longer.

Closing his tired blue eyes, not bothering to keep in the silent, inconsolable tears anymore, now that the job was finished, the forty-something male sniffled out one last small bit of amusement in this life before the inescapable end.

"You were right, Fury," he spoke to the ghost of the legendary bad-ass Director of Shield, from the fantastic Marvel Universe, "If we can't save this Earth, we'll damn well make sure to avenge her until they leave us alone. Zalut!"

With his last breath, senior field agent Timothy McGee, of NCIS – MRT for the last 17 years, thumbed a button on the small device at his belt as he lay down on the plastic covered wooden floor of the brand new, unsold, condominium apartment. His hands held the battered flask over his slowing heart, and a clutch of photos of dear teammates and beloved family was in his shirt pocket. Practical and prepared as the lifelong boy-scout he had been, he was already dressed in his best 'meeting at the capitol' workday suit for his funeral. Not that he expected there to be anybody alive to give him one, especially given what came next. He was just never one to leave things to chance, nor leave a mess for others to clean in his stead. And at his age, in the circumstances the country was traversing, it wasn't time anymore to change who he was.
"Semper Fi, Boss! The job's done, and I'm coming home now." he whispered to old ghosts only his glazed, blind eyes could see as he claimed his well earned reward amongst passed heroes at long last.

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Under the tripod of the experimental gunnery system, inside the couch, two wingback chairs and in the kitchen inside the appliances, several dull gray cylinders with a glowing green timer on one end were counting down the final seconds. An instant later, nine thermite charges totaling 27 pounds of incendiary explosives triggered, annihilating the prized auto-rifle, the furniture, the dead corpse and the entire apartment's contents down to the concrete dividers and steel frame inside of 7 seconds.

Then the fire, so dense it was almost liquid as Hawaiian lava, corroded through the floor and walls, conflagrating through the edifice at speeds only firefighters and munitions experts could comprehend. Windows exploded outwards in great fireballs as the gas lines erupted, causing a sonic boom felt at six blocks around. People were set ablaze from just the unholy ambient heat, reaching close to 3,000 Celsius on its own, igniting their body fat, hair and humors, jumped out of any aperture they had, falling down to their deaths from both impact and burns. The modern edifice, finished building less than 8 months ago, took less than 11 minutes to become a 17 storey high roman candle in the Washington DC skyline.

At that moment, it was only one of some 38 buildings burning, along with about 400 cars and a few dozen dumpsters. There were already no more firefighting crews anywhere inside the municipal limits of the District of Columbia, as they had been purged or fled for their family's safety. The few soldiers still loyal to the new White Christian Regency were all holed up at the White House grounds, the Pentagon's underground parking garages, or the military bases that surround DC, even two that had been reactivated specially to house only the Inquisitor / Crusader barracks, infirmaries and secret jails for internal discipline.

Soon though, even these places would no longer be safe from rage, revolt, fire spreading wildly and winter's furious assaults. Without orders, active command structure, or even a municipal authority to answer to, the felonious soldiers would abandon these installations to Nature's whim by the end of the week. Maybe sooner, since they had no support to bring in food and necessities, plus, the infrastructures were shutting down from massive damage all over town and the neighboring states.

DXS – NCIS arrival in Vancouver

(NCIS - LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 20:00pm
Western America; Sunday 20th of December, 2020; 17:00pm
Diefenbaker Military Airport
Vancouver, BC, Canada

After one stressful hour on the Los Angeles tarmac, followed by slightly less anxious 4 hours in the air, the DXS airplane crossed the Canadian borderlines with official permission coming expressly from Ottawa, from the cabinet of Prime Minister Trudeau himself. The short, terse exchange of formalities had been handled directly by senior pilot Sampson, never reaching the teams in the passenger compartment. That small detail certainly surprised them, when they heard over the intercom that they had gotten the go-ahead that easily, and quickly, too.
There was one small detail though; the Canadians were not idiots, nor incompetent at military matters that required finesse and discretion. And, in these trying times, with the southern neighbors having committed societal suicide, allowing any American heavy-weight jet into the international civilian airport on Sea Island, right in the middle of Vancouver, would raise questions nobody wanted asked. Consequently, the pilots of the MD11C-refit had been ordered to alter their flight course on a westward trajectory the very moment they passed the official Canadian airspace. They were to head out over the blue waters, putting them just about between the city of Vancouver and the capital city of British Columbia, Victoria, which was located on the large island named Vancouver also. By navigating over the safe internal airspace of the wide sea channel between continent and island, the plane would be able to bypass both cities, just outside of naked-eye perception, without calling undue attention to the activity. Then, when they were about ten miles past Vancouver city's northern urban zone, they would turn eastward, inland, to reach Canada's largest strategic facility on the Pacific seaboard.

The Diefenbaker inter-systems Pacific Seaboard command Airport.

The 4 kilometers deep by eight kilometers wide complex was situated in the foothills of the Rockies, perched on tall cliffs overlooking the sea's frigid blue waves by a hundred feet. The Canadian military had blasted and quarried an impressive amount of natural debris, millions of tons in fact, to flatten out the surface required, then dig down through the under-layers as well as horizontally into the mountain's core to create a vast network of bunkers, hangars and weaponry emplacements. In usage since World War I as an armed military supply & repair port, they had added weather balloons and observation dirigibles around 1918. During World War II, new technology saw the erection of long range radar towers, more flak turrets, and the small airfield was expanded to full runways to permit propeller or jet planes by 1941. Since the planet fell in the grips of the Cold War against communism and many countries of the Pacific Rim gave themselves over either to Russia or Islamic fanaticism, the entire complex had never ceased its feverish operations. Always expanding the cleared flattened surface, modernizing existing infrastructures, and staying vital to the defense of BC and Canada on the west coast. The last decade saw the updating of the ship docks to receive massive cargo container ships and combat submarines, expanding the railway triage yards & workshops, and completing four anti-ICBM interceptor launchers with new missile types. The Canadians had also finished building twenty housing towers of 10 storeys, with 200 units for 8 people per apartment, with panic room in each suite, communal underground bunkers, garages, grocery & convenience stores, emergency medical facility and open public socialization areas in each building. That would allow them to bring in up to 4,000 complete families on-site to bolster combat, medical and mechanical capacities by an incredible factor that few bases could boast.

"Yeah, them canucks know how to live in their damned white shit all year long." thought Jack Dalton, "And they know how to put up a good fight, history had proven that." He gave the base a detached, professional gaze from the plane's cockpit, seated at the flight engineer's console during the shortened landing phase with Riley at the nav/comm console on his left, even though she let the pilot do all the talking with the tower. The ex-Delta Forces specialist was an old hand at casing an enemy base for weaknesses and movement corridors in/out to commit mayhem. That had become an even more vital skill recently, given his primary mission partner's penchant for causing disasters just by being a curious brat with unstoppable hands. Spying on-the-fly over the vast installation, as big as the best the USA or Russia had built to date, he could easily see that taking this frozen, forlorn place by force wouldn't be easy, even for the well equipped, strongly numbered armies of China, the Montagnard or Russia.

The cliffs were a little over 100 yards of sheer vertical stony height, with little to grip to if you rappelled, whipped by watery winds charged with salty brine that would sting your eyes fiercely, and chill you to the core in barely two minutes tops. The artificial plateau was as level and smooth as only reinforced, mechanically set concrete could ever become. The lip of the plateau overlooking the
sea was interspersed with large CWIS turrets; beastly machines of hard steel, big enough for two men to be inside to manually operate the weapons if the central network was down or hacked. Each defensive turret was armed with a central 5 inch naval rifle for long kills at 50 miles, two quads of energy-based pulse rifles for short range interception at 10 miles, and two independent – 'nodules' – each with a chain-fed Pine Needle 50.cal electro-chemical autogun for close-in strafing inside 3 miles. Plus, vertically in the back portion of the turrets, were three sets of four launch tubes filled with Sapin #I plasma warhead, all-purpose missiles for heavy interceptions inside 250 miles.

Turrets might seem an 'antiquated' way to defend a strategic place, since most conventional wisdom, from the invention of the ballista onwards, stated that static systems would always lose to mobile weaponry. Especially since, throughout history to date, mobile devices were smaller, cheaper, and easier to mass-produce or replace that the massive stationary siege defenses normally built. It was also much easier to bring more attack forces to a siege line than to bring more defenders, as the number of positions inside an enclosed defensible perimeter would always be, by the very reality of closed spaces, tightly limited.

That wouldn't be the case here. Besides the huge complex teeming with peoples of all sorts, there were four clear ways to bring in more, and even the best equipped enemy would grind to a halt if they didn't come in nuclear or biological from the onset. The defender's multi-axial beam weapons and hypersonic ship-killing missiles would see to it.

Jack could easily see a line of similar heavy CWIS turrets along the perimeter of the base, from the sea front all the way to the mountain façade, and at strategic places at the very joint of the plateau and vertical cliff-back of the rising, hard stone mountains. The two semi-exposed flanks of the base were further protected by dry moats 60 feet across and 30 feet deep, with two lines of thick military grade spiked, electrified, chain-link fences and several dozen guard dogs that roamed loosely between the metal barriers. There were 3 concrete gate-keeps with flat roofs, mounting three CWIS turrets atop each, visible on each of the base's two land flanks. The ocean cliff-front had a set of twelve massive concrete piers and docks built upwards from the sea floor, their main level being at 20 feet above the waves. On the outer tips of each pier were similar CWIS turrets, but mounted on a ten foot tall, round, cement bunker with 24 murder slits all around, to shoot at invading enemies that might make it to stand on the docks. Deep inside the docking berths, in the rocky cliff-face, were several pairs of massive vertical slabs of steel that served as blast doors, blocking the access to the repair drydocks dug deep into the living rock of the foothills.

Jack couldn't see the underwater torpedo launchers, heavy plasma laser arrays and CWIS pulse rifle turrets to repel missiles and divers. He knew they were there, though. He'd been briefed on the layout of the place, four years ago, by Patricia Thornton. Just like he knew there were four brand new anti-ICBM interceptor launchers that had been dug out of the mountain's high façade, 1,000 feet above the base, just in case the Chinese or Russians decided to try a quick grab for resource-rich land. These launchers held dozens of Canada's newly built 30 foot long Witchlight #I ionic warhead, Mach 10 hypersonic cruise missiles, capable of flying at 2,13 miles per second. These vectors were based on the US Tomahawk system, but re-designed with a scramjet system to take out other missiles or large ships, at 1,500 miles inside of a 12 minutes reaction window.

Anybody thinking Canada was a dead mule with four lame legs would get a few surprise kicks in the teeth, if they didn't check where they stepped when they visited. And they'd better call first.

Also, the classified maps showed an atmospheric recycling tower, built high up, deep inside the mountain chain, surrounded by a back-up military base in case this one was attacked by such force that they managed to land invading troops for a physical takeover. Good luck with that. After Sebastian Lund's explanation of Canada's preference for biological research in defensive applications, earlier this morning, that nice big hospital in the north portion of the base didn't seem so...
inviting anymore. A bloody Typhoid Mary, more like it. And having an ART essentially meant the zone up to 500km around the tower could be awash in poison inside of a few short hours, depending on the winds.

"Well, at least they ain't going down the crapper with us. That's always good." the fifty year old veteran thought glibly as he saw the landscape shift rapidly as the massive jet maneuvered for its approach down to the assigned runway.

A runway that had four BV 206 (Repeller variant) tracked carriers and two main battle tanks never seen before; the Avalanche AI-#I (Amphibious Infantry Mark-I). These tanks were the brainchild of a cooperation between Canada, Israel, Germany, Sweden and Norway to produce a battle-wagon capable of taking on a full 4-man crew plus 8 others inside the vehicle to shelter them from climate, incendiary, chemical, biological or radiation attacks. These vehicles were 75 feet long by 15 feet wide, with 4 feet wide tracks, a huge main-assault turret, eight mini-CWIS turrets, cargo hatch on top, personnel doors on both long sides, plus an 8 foot wide cargo loading ramp at the back. These 323 ton machines were fully amphibious to a depth of 150 feet as their engines were hybrid electro-plasmatic reactors, not the usual diesel turbo-charged piston systems other tanks used. Since the turrets all had beam weapons coaxial to their main projectile guns, the tanks could fight underwater too.

Nasty bastards, those. And a nastier surprise since Jack hadn't received confirmation of their existence yet. In fact, his most comprehensive briefing on this complex dated back to Thornton; Matty never needed them in this region before, and, let's face it, the USA never really took Canada as a serious military power since WW-II was done. That decision was obviously an error to correct.

"Oh well, no time like the present..." the soldier mumbled dryly as he mentally took notes. Good ideas deserved copying post haste, especially if it helped his own people survive as a nation. Or at least, as a family. And he needed to talk to his crew into thinking about how to hot-wire and drive them thingies, in case events went pear-shaped the way they tended to when spying & sabotage was the game in play.

The DXS plane was directed to land on an airstrip calibrated to receive extra-jumbo jets like those that ferry the space shuttle or, in case their allies had needed it, US Air Force 1 and its escorts. Then it was guided immediately to taxi into an enclosed, isolated, surface hangar to be scanned, analyzed, and decontaminated as necessary. The crew and passengers were to be brought to the hangar's built-in medical quarantine facility to be scanned and cleared as well, given how public sanitation and health services had imploded over the last 3 days inside their homeland. The Canadians might be willing to tolerate them, and even accommodate them to a point, but not if it brought pathogens or parasites inside their population. Besides, they DID have a reputation, if the gossip from the Royal Canadian Air Force colonel in charge of them was to be believed.

"Lies! Such spurious lies, and calumnies, too!" Jack had responded playfully, his Texan accent full of mock outrage and drama, much to the amusement of the surrounding persons. "Well what? Denying things works for politicians; why not for our team?" he asked aloud.

"Yeeaaah... And where did that get ya'll, in the last two elections?" answered the colonel, snarkily like only someone who'd 'been there' AND 'done that' while in service under the flag could manage with a straight face, but still keep the tone funny. Strange combo, yes, but you didn't survive shell-shock and PTSD by staying stuffed like a bottle. You found ways to express, or you popped like aforementioned bottle.

Given the very small amount of foreigners on base at the time, the medical analysis and identification verifications were done quite quickly, in under an hour for all ten persons. The two pilots were
offered bunks in a segregated suite that had three bedrooms with four bunks each, with communal sanitation, cooking and living spaces fit for 12 people year-round. The tactical deployment dormitory wasn't used right now, so it wasn't a biggie for the colonel to assign it to just two people. Especially since it was to be the official lodgings for the other eight persons as well, if their meeting with Lucas Wolenczak went down the pipes, as such things were wont to do when politicians and lawyers got involved.

That, plus the kid had a nasty reputation for being 'violently stubborn', the VCPD had reported.

It was possible, though, that they weren't completely objective. He had made fools of them in public, then set his attack bitches... ahem... lawyers after them for police brutality. That could, potentially, 'bias' the organization's perception of the adolescent. Men were not perfect, after all.

Anyways, the combined teams were assigned the spacious accommodations with basic supplies to take a much needed rest for the night, while their paperwork and authorizations were finalized to allow them to carry weapons, body armor and badges during their stay. The fact the NCIS lawyers on team had been told unequivocally that this was "not their choice" did factor into the decisional process, yes, but honestly, they were all beyond fatigued, stressed out with worry about their loved ones, and not confidant at all about the job ahead of them. The estimate that it would take only a short ten-or-so hours to process everything was miraculous, as they had guessed at closer to 4 - 6 days. Apparently, someone in Ottawa wanted them out of their borders ASAP, and all possible methods were being exercised for such expedited ends. Again, their opinions weren't needed.

In the end, the agents were truly grateful for the time to get a good solid meal, some shut-eye to decompress their minds, and thanked Riley profusely for connecting them back to the Deeks house in Los Angeles to speak with their relatives on a secure line. Being able to comfort and reassure their mothers had the best, most calming effect any of them could have needed that evening. A series of quick emails over to their agencies to inform them of circumstances had the video conference planned for tomorrow at 8:00am. They would have their tactical vid-meet, then be driven to the Daleminton Hotel complex in a militarized 'command bus' fitting 24 extra-large seats on two rows, a planning table, a field command comms hub with retractable antennae, two toilet stalls and two mini CWIS turrets on the roof. The heavy 60 foot long armored vehicle would be escorted by a pair of old fashioned Canadian military police LAV-III carrying four soldiers each.

They were imposed a CSIS liaison officer aboard their bus for the trip forth & back, that would accompany them during the meeting scheduled with Lucas at 12:00am noon. Apparently, the young man had 'insisted' on the Canadian government playing their expected role as host country fully, with all due diligence towards his welfare, in the coming negotiations. Oh, Joy!

{ SQ } --- { } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 11:00am
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 08:00am

The morning was off to a rough start for the DXS and NCIS teams.

Getting up between 8:00am and 9:00am so they could take a leisurely shower, eat a good sized breakfast, and sip some not-bad coffee seated on something that wasn't motorized and getting shot at, the start-up routine had seemed to foresee an ordinary day. Then they'd been told that their suite reservations at the Daleminton had been canceled by Lucas Wolenczak on the pretext they were housed by the military base, so no need for him to spend a penny more. Furthermore, they were warned that the teenager had reserved his Vancouver based lawyers for the meeting. As if that weren't enough shit-dressed-in-a-suit, the runt had managed to transport his actual Canadian litigation team based out of Sault-Sainte-Marie in Ontario all the way here, yesterday evening. They would
carry out the actual argumentation with the diverse government levels whilst the Vancouver people were reduced down to support-team stance only.

And they were arguing something fierce, too, with arguments that the Canadians, Mexicans and EUO were listening to even as the DXS and NCIS teams were on the phone with their bosses for another joint vid-meet to set the day's agenda.

Rumors from their two directors, before going on the road, had informed them that there was chatter coming out of Washington DC that Trump and several of his Exalted Lord Bishops plus multiple key cabinet members and high White House staff were killed yesterday. By incredible bad luck, neither NCIS nor DXS had any human contacts left inside the District of Columbia, and practically all the 'illicit' cybernetic links had been destroyed or taken over by Trumpists, many of whom were not officially hired inside the bureaucracy, police or Grand Crusade Army.

These reports of high-level deaths were still only rumors also because most of the government's formal public relations apparatus had been undergoing dramatic changes immediately in the wake of the White Christian Regency coming to power, then falling into the US Civil Collapse of 2020 without any preamble, right at the same time. Added to this was the crudely effected attempt at censoring all privately owned broadcast media systems operating at the national level like CNN, CBS, ABC, MSNBC, and NPR. Even the small PBS which covered parts of Canada, in Quebec and Ontario, was therefore seen as important in controlling the USA's external image and narrative to foreigners. The fully automated, centrally controlled, censorship AI algorithms couldn't really keep up with that many broadcasters and the Internex on top, plus the fact the technicians managing the system were not at all experienced with it, nor did they get any practice run before it was activated. Add to this situation the fact that several thousand people used Virtual Private Network applications to log onto foreign news streams to receive/send information on the REAL events inside the USA, and the amateurish system had only about 63% efficiency across all broadcasters and bandwidths.

Aside this critical development in their homeland, DXS listening outpost in Miami - Dade county had intercepted encrypted comms between the World Bank and UEO Council whom had been in hushed, intensive talks with the Canadian Prime Minister all through the night. The field personnel were warned that nothing good would come of this, and to expect some form of push-back from the teenager, supported by the WB’s governor, and possibly by Andrea Dre who had finally manifested her existence, rather late in the whole shebang. Reportedly, she had suspended all her familial holidays in New Zealand to fly back to New Cape Quest in one of the UEO's few supersonic command & EW-C planes. The people still friendly to the USA's original statehood on the ground in NCQ had forwarded information that the planet's leading figure was in a Hell-raising mood upon landing, and would not be easy to negotiate with, or even just placate with bland agreement on what she said. And that there, just guaranteed their mission would go bust. With Dre most certainly backing the kid's autonomy to manage his own life and businesses, practically all the federations and countries would file in line, following her lead. Vying for a different outcome was pretty much a fool's errand by now.

After the 10:00am not-so-good vidphone conference, they were assembling their stuff to go on the road when the same colonel who had processed their intake yesterday came into the dormitory to inform them their authorizations had just been amended by Ottawa, at the insistence of the UEO. They no longer had any rights or privileges to carry any weapons other than basic survival knives, to which was added the fact that ALL guns were to be packed away in a secured locker, under MP jurisdiction, until they left the country. Their team leaders were getting the written versions of this as they spoke, by email from Ottawa and NCQ jointly. Without any room for arguing the point, the teams disarmed and repacked their mission packs then followed the colonel down to the street where their ride was waiting.
The three vehicles composing the armored convoy were drab forest green, with only a few small positioning LED's at the corners of the frames or turrets. Wilt had gotten a few snorts of snarky amusement from Jack, Kensi and Marty when he had exclaimed aloud "Whaaat? No battle tanks? Take a look how much they trust us already! My, but these northern types are friendly! A lot better than back home, is all I have to say..."

The infantryman in charge of driving the bus didn't seem to react, and the anonymous CSIS agent gave them all a bland, inoffensive smile that reminded them of Matty Webber and Shay Mosley during a vid-meet. Patently false, but you dared not call him on it, for fear he'd show you what he really was underneath.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 14:00pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 11:00am

They set out of Diefenbaker Military Complex at exactly 11:00am without any visible problems or reasons to think things would go worse. Well, other than politicians and bureaucrats getting involved, but those came with the lay of the land, so they'd have to deal with. Still, mechanically and tactically, everything seemed fine especially since the CSIS agent stayed in front, seated in the first large chair next to the door and driver. The two field teams had been able to sit themselves at the planning table and surrounding chairs without any kerfuffles of rank or posturing. Simply, the two lawyers, Lund and Mack got the table, Riley got the comms hub console, and the rest seated nearby as they could.

"Well, isn't this a pretty little jar of pickles we got dumped in..." griped Tammy Gregorio without any real anger. "Them eager beavers have sure been up to no good, hidden under their white blanket all along. And they didn't think to share. Not very neighborly, if you ask me."

Answering snorts from all over told her the sentiment was shared, especially by the spooks from the DXS team. MacGyver, who seemed in much better health now than she'd ever seen him, actually cracked a joke at her, saying "Don't talk about it too much yet. Normally, in military espionage, when you get to see that kinda stuff, it's cuz the man-in-charge won't let you live to blab. Sooo, be nice to the kind CSIS agent, and don't diss the boys in green camo. We could quickly need all the sympathy we can find to avoid getting sent up to the 'Great Beaver Dam' secret prison up in James Bay."

A few people blinked their eyes interrogatively, with Sebastian Lund actually raising his head to look at the blond male seated across from him, next to agent Deeks. Tammy, sitting just left of Seb, asked the bearded forensics tech "What? You look you're about to go deep dark on me."

Giving an amused huff, her partner replied "There is no such place as 'Great Beaver Dam prison' anywhere in Canada." Pointing a finger at the younger blond male, he wagged it in mock sternness, instructing him; "You shouldn't say things like that about black sites. You'll scare the kiddies into a tizzy, and you could give the canucks ideas they clearly don't need, not with Diefenbaker built the way it is already."

Jack Dalton was laughing discretely in his closed fist while Blye, Bozer and Davis seemed relieved, even as Deeks grunted an absentminded something from the depths of the paperwork on the two active tablets he was using. They had just received a humongous batch of 'stuff' from Wise Apothecary & Chemists, Wolenbahn Electronics International, the Canadian ministry of Citizenship & Immigration, the North American Confederation HQ (temp. loc. Mexico city) and UEO council, passed along from the cabinet of Andrea Dre. Marty grunted again as he swiped the first tablet, sending via Blue Tooth the files over to Gregorio's own tablet, so she could process and resume the superfluously voluble forms. Somebody sure liked the English language's written form, cuz they'd gone and made a damned crapton of it for no good reason that could be discerned.
Kensi looked at her fiancé in sympathy, for once unable to help at all with any of the formularies and reports since it was way too legal and diplomatic for her capacities. Even their colleague, agent Gregorio, seemed clearly put back by the sheer volume and overly detailed nature of the files. An odd sniffing sound came from Riley Davis at the comms console, as she was giving a try at analyzing some of the less specialized files they had gotten. She was supposed to act as their para-legal for the mission and, to her, that wasn't just a cover but a real job to do, so she was trying her best.

"Well, it's official." the young woman grumped as she scrolled through reams of forms, reports and questionnaires on her screen. "We've officially reached 'Stonewall Town' and the customs office is closed until further notice. Damn, but this is gonna hurt when we call home, after the meeting."

The two lawyers looked up at the same time, asking her what she had seen to say such a thing.

"It's right here, in this 'exigent brief' submitted by World Bank governor Desdenski. It states that WB charter clauses stipulate 'All employees or contractors of security clearance grades 10 and above are reputed as having full citizenship, with the rights of a person 21 years of age, anywhere inside the UEO Alliance at large, without needing a member-country as native homeland to seat this claim & position.' It then states that Lucas Wolenczak was graded level AIT-SSS-10-Ex in 2017, then level 11 in 2018, then level 13 in 2019, and just got boosted to level AIT-MD-DFS-SS-CCA#16-Ex/PV as of August 2020. That clearance was validated by the UEO department of military intelligence because it's valid across the entire alliance, and allows him to access classified data, IT systems and locales. In particular, that coded denomination means 'Artificial Intelligence Technologies; Management – Directorate; Design – Fabrication – Supply; Support Services; classified/compartmented access #16; External contractor; Prioritized Value'. This guy's been vetted by Section 7 when he passed CCA #13, and again at CCA #15, so he's politically and legally armored up to his hair from deep inside the UEO military brass, on top of whatever the World Bank would do. We ain't gonna touch him, let alone move him, not without going off the books so far we become rogues for it." The 27 year old woman explained, worry evident in her voice.

"Well damn. This ain't gonna end well." Marty Deeks swore softly, his blue eyes looking out the window, idly scanning the thinning tree cover as they were entering the district of North Vancouver, their target hotel just another 15 or so minutes away at the speed the impressive convoy maintained. Turning to the persons around him, he commented aloud "It's not what that brief contains that worries me. Honestly, Gregorio and I expected something in the style, just delivered differently. Think about it, people. If we'd been told that yesterday morning, the mission would have aborted right then & there, because it's some of the plainest legal verbiage you'll find. The UEO wrote in the charters of the major planetary institutions a set of protections for its critical employees or contractors, in case a rogue country tried to falsely arrest & ransom one or two in exchange for concessions. Basically, to attack Wolenczak is to attack the UEO Alliance charter directly; an act of war. Legally and politically, at least. But, if they knew that already, and I'm bloody sure everybody including Mosley and Webber knew, why were we allowed to waste our time and dwindling resources to come here for nothing? That's what scares me, you know? The fact I can sense that somebody's playing the 'long game' in the shadows, but I can't see the guy, or what he's doing. My gut's telling me it's a trap, just not a fatal one, not in the shoot-to-kill sorts of trap, but were being 'boobied' all the same."

"Don't matter anymore, now," Jack shrugged it off as he pointed at the front of the armored bus. Through the large windshield they could see the massive pine log structures of the Daleminton Hotel over the short houses and low density apartment blocks that separated them from their destination.

 Barely three minutes later and the convoy was entering the drive lane that led to the rear parking lot of the hotel where they were met by four Vancouver Police department squad cars, one VPD
supervisor minivan, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police mobile command post already set in field config, and another pair of nameless spooks in tailored suits & trenchcoats. Their three vehicles were made to park at the far end of the lot to avoid crowding the hotel building, as well as give the heavy gunnery systems some free-range to act if they needed to defend against attackers. The DXS and NCIS teams were surprised to see that the bus driver and soldiers from the LAV-III escorts stayed inside their vehicles rather than come meet the assembled officers outside. Only their CSIS escort came with them, and only so far as to pass them along to the waiting pair of other spooks at the hotel's back lobby.

The eight agents were identified, saluted, then escorted in full, oppressive silence. They walked through the rear lobby, passed the entry to the large restaurant and gift shop, then up the decorative cement & wood stairs to the second floor, and suite 204. Before they even knocked or rang, the door was opened by yet another CSIS agent, this one wearing a clearly bespoke suit with designer glasses and a bronze name tag that simply showed the Canadian flag in red with the logo for CSIS next to it.

A 'big boss' then. Well, hot damn, but things had gotten complicated fast.

A strong, young voice that they knew well called out from deep inside the suite, inviting them to enter with ominous words. "Come in, come in, little kiddies, my poor webs are empty and cold without your presence. Besides, I was just about to have lunch, and couldn't do that without ya'll."

Mindful of the old proverb about spiders, flies and meals, they entered, seeing at once they had indeed been 'boobied' as Deeks had foreseen. And no, fun would not be had by anyone today.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:00pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:00am - noon

Lucas Wolenczak was sitting comfortably at the head of the decorative glass dining table, backlit by the cheery cast iron wood stove that cast gentle warmth and playfully moving lights as the pine logs burned. He was dressed in dark purple jeans with a deep blue T-shirt and checkered blue & gray flannel shirt worn completely open on top. He was poking idly at the tip of his black sneakers with the end of his night black cane, the thin blue veins inlaid along the metal shaft glowing mysteriously from the reflected firelight.

The first three seats on his left hand were occupied by people unknown to either teams, but the other three were the Vancouver lawyers. Seated along the right side of the table were yet another CSIS agent in high quality suit, an RCMP high officer, the VPD commissioner, and three people in brown suits off-the-rack that just screamed 'bureaucrats' from a mile away, but neither had name tags or even agency badges to refer to. As there were no seats left, the eight new arrivals were made to stand in the kitchen area with their bags in hand, a clear sign they wouldn't be staying long.

The CSIS agent who let them in closed the door and locked it, then stood before it, at parade rest with his hands joined in front of him. Clearly, they weren't getting out without permission, so this wasn't just an ordinary meet & greet anymore. The eight people had already made up their minds that the chances of having the kid leave with them were 0%, but this was getting weird in a bad way.

The senior CSIS agent seated at the table turned sideways to look them over, then signaled the young doctor for something. The teenager indolently poked at the thin tablet laying on the table before him, the hard-wired device beeping in response. Seconds later, the large Internex monitor mounted on the wall near the dining table activated, split the screen in four images and dialed four separate lines at the same time. Inside of mere seconds, their meeting was joined by Mathilda Webber, Shay Mosley, Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister of Canada) and Andrea Dre (Secretary General of the UEO
Marty Deeks could feel a cool shiver of dread going down his spine as the pale skinned, blond haired woman who was the planet's leading figure gazed on them all through the monitor in a manner that could only be described as 'withheld anger' or flat out 'predatory', depending on how pessimistic you were. Either way, the woman wasn't in a good mood, and sitting at her massive metal desk, in her office high atop the UEO building in New Cape Quest with a large part of Miami visible through her windows in the far background, it all made for a presentation that shouted out "You fucked with POWER so now you suffer". Then, looking coldly around the assembly of officers and agents in the room, he wondered if it really mattered what Dre did, given they were at 'ground zero' for the explosion about to happen. He only needed one straight look at Wolenczak's closed-off facial expression to understand that there would be pain aplenty for everyone around, regardless of how guilty they were.

Kensi Blye was having similar feelings to her fiancé, but more because of the accumulated soldiers, policemen and bureaucrats that all had ranks WAY above them. All these people were visibly armed and wore body armor, whilst all their kits had been disarmed before leaving the dorms. Tactically speaking, everybody in this room was more dangerous than all of them, except perhaps for the Delta Forces expert, Jack Dalton, and herself, but for how long? And against that many people packed into such a small space, nobody could dodge anything, plus the boy was known to use poison grenades, just as he did two days ago when he was attacked in the hotel lobby. Their capacity to decide anything was now nil, and any 'soft influence' they thought to use on the kid was neutralized without any way forward.

Tammy Gregorio gave a single sideways look at Sebastian Lund, instinctively following his lead to slowly move backwards, and sideways, to positions directly near the door leading to the hotel's internal corridor. Her gut told her this wasn't their place to be, let alone their fight, and Seb's pale skin, tight lips and squinted eyes told her all she needed. He had seen the situation, instantly guessing they were stuck with bad odds, no leeway, nothing credible in hand to negotiate with, and even thinking about asking for credit due or patience from these people was a no-starter, if not actual suicide given the tense atmosphere in the tightly packed room. Then Tammy saw the kid had a new cane, different model, that he was fiddling with as if it were a toy rather than a murder weapon they all knew it to be. Not good, not good at all, and they were stuck inside until allowed to leave. Damn! What now?

Wilt Bozer had, as a black skinned child living in a fundamentally racist America, developed very good instincts to know when to either bluff through a confrontation with bullies, or retreat actively from genuinely dangerous threats. His gut was now twisting like a damned pretzel, telling him that EVERYBODY in the room was an openly violent threat, none more than the thin sickly blond kid at the end of the table. The fact that face-to-face Bozer could see just how much Lucas did look exactly like Angus had at that age, hair, facial structure, body type, hand shape... It all made alarm bells ring inside his mind. His friend had been surrounded by kindness and support most of his life, so his humongous genius hadn't been turned to violence and destruction. Well, not the criminal kind anyways; he'd been an EOD tech in the army, then had gone to DXS for whom he routinely blew up, torched, acidified and tore apart an exorbitant amount of materials, but all 'legally', as much as those jobs had permission. Bozer was sure that the teenager had no such support, no moral compass, and now, looking at those deep luminous blue eyes that were so much like Angus' when he was 15... Taking hold of Riley's forearm gently to not scare her since she was frozen solid and unresponsive, the prosthetics & makeup expert tugged her backwards, slowly aiming for the entry doorway, only to see that Lund and Gregorio had felt similar instincts that bad shit was going down in earnest, and an egress was needed post haste. Ah, crud! What had they jumped into, this time?

Riley Davis had frozen stiff to the point of paralysis. She didn't know why, until the object of their
mission had raised his head, turning his face towards them fully. She had been unable to hold down the shiver of monstrous dread that crawled down her spine, from her nape all the way to her tailbone, making her wish ardently for a deep, dark hole to hide in. This kid had a predator's gaze, slow, indolent, cold and uncaring as he evaluated her worth in his life. The worse part though, was that he was visually the spitting mirror image of Angus MacGyver at that age, from the family films or photos she had seen from Bozer. Even with a good eleven years of difference between them, the facial structure, body type and overall appearance similarities... It was like seeing differentiated twins side-by-side to compare them, if one had been stuck in ice while the other was allowed to grow. That analogy woke up a nasty thought, niggling at the back of her mind, as she remembered something she should never have seen when she hacked the NSA five years back, before going to jail.

The DAGGER program.

GUELF – Genetically Uniform Engineered Life Forms.

Mold-cast humans, purpose-built, produced in series for a single job...

America's dirty inhumane secret; a vestige of World War II and the Cold War afterwards, inspired by the Captain America comic strips Marvel had been publishing for decades. A somber plot to create super-soldiers on industrial scale to achieve numbers, not just high quality in one unit. It had been a success, of sorts, but too costly, too late, and no longer useful given how changed the geopolitical landscape had become. Now, a quarter of the planet had high-powered fuel-air bombs, smart munitions for 50.cal machine guns were common, and shoulder fired rockets were being replaced by man-portable one-shot chemical lasers as fast as the workshops could push them out to sell. So the DAGGER's, the 'cheap & disposable' organic super-weapons of America were shamefully hidden away, under permanent military imposed quarantine, on a remote island, in a minuscule prison that took the entire landmass, not far off the southernmost tip of Florida so as to still be inside US national waters. A set of 500 completely artificial humans, their skin colored in a psychedelic polychromatic pattern so that nobody ever mistook them for naturally bred people. All of them were so exactly similar, it was even said to be 'rigorously identical anthropomorphism' by some reports, to the point one biologist had commented they had essentially found a way to "Scan and reliably Xerox ourselves a basic human template a few hundred times" like he was talking about a page in a library book.

Was it possible? Could Angus and Lucas be two sides of a similar scheme of genetics engineering, but destined to produce super-genius technicians and doctors, instead of dreaded super-soldiers? MacGyver's performances in the combat parts of his field missions meant he certainly wasn't the dead-weight of the team, even with his aversion to firearms, although that one seemed to have finally passed. Lucas was an uber genius, equal or above Angus, with official diplomas at younger ages too, and fighting skills that seemed grossly underestimated to date, as the long line of bodies appended to his name proved. And James MacGyver was a superlative field agent, with a mind equal to his son plus a few decades of experience, and known fighting capacities to match any US Rangers veteran still alive. Was that the reason James always kept a close eye on his son from afar, influencing his schooling, his career and the missions he got assigned? Even going so far as to vet and direct who he had sex with, without Mac ever realizing for the better part of the last 15 years? Was it all done to ascertain the status and continuity of the program, the quality and capacities of each new increment in the production line as they churned out newer models with better capacities?

Another shiver of cold dark dread oozed down her spine, this time knocking her out of her pensive state, forcing her to realize that Wilt was holding on to her hand which he had used to maneuver them both closer to the doorway, ready for a speedy exit if – when – things went bad. Man! Just how far out of it was she, that she never even felt her body move in response to her partner's cues? But all that left her mind as she saw the reaction that Angus and Lucas had to each other, now that they
were finally face-to-face, and close enough to look each other in the eyes.

They froze.

Both of them froze hard, paralyzed beyond capacity to move or express as they gazed deeply into each other's eyes, clear light green and eerily luminescent sapphire blue.

Then Lucas snorted inelegantly, shrugging off the paralysis and whatever emotional 'thing' had happened just now, between adult and teenager who had never met before in their lives. Leaning backwards in his dining armchair, the adolescent caressed the hatchet edge of his pommel with the pad of his right hand thumb idly, as the left hand held the tool right under the molded pistol grip. Making a completely artificial smile appear on his face, more a smirk of satisfied superiority in truth, the boy looked at MacGyver from his hair down to his shoes then back up, as if he were evaluating a farm animal for purchase. The feel of the situation wasn't lost on anybody, but it was Jack Dalton who broke the aggressively silent moment with his interjection.

"Hey! Kids!" he said while moving a hand up & down between the two blonds to get their attention focused on his movements. "You can have your 'mutual admiration' thing later on, when we know what's gonna happen. Capisce? The important people here don't have all day." he insisted by pointing at the table full of agents and officers who were all waiting silently for a cue from someone higher in the food chain.

The teenager responded in venomous tones, without ever looking towards Jack; "I do hope nobody cares for this one's life, as he just forfeited it. The BEAST needs something to quell its hunger, if you want it to be patient during the meeting. You are all wasting enough of my precious time and tolerance, but you have the ranks, jobs and positions in society to justify it. This, however, I will not accept. NEVER have I suffered fools. Not even my birth parents! I will not remain silent or inactive before this. Remove him and the other useless grunts from the room, or accept that they are part of the offering you tithe me to purchase my patience." he finished with an enraged snarl.

Angus MacGyver reared backwards as if he'd just been slapped, his eyes blinking rapidly, trying to look everywhere all at once to ascertain threats, as he woke himself up in a clearly visible panic from an episode of dissociation similar to what Riley had experienced. Moving purely by instinct, the 27 year old male grabbed the shoulder of his fifty year old comrade-in-arms to pull him backwards from what he now understood to be a catastrophic threat to all of them. He couldn't tell you in words WHY he was so certain, but he'd bet his life and all his friendships that the little teenaged boy seated in front of them was the worse menace in the entire hotel complex at the moment. And that was while taking into account the presence of some of the NCIS and DXS top hitters on site during the same time-frame.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:12pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:12am - noon

Any objections Jack, Angus, or anybody else could try to verbalize were cut short when the Internex monitor so kindly beeped an 'emergency broadcast' coming in, for all citizens to hear. The four images of the persons on remote conference were automatically reduced to small mortises stacked one atop each other in the left side of the monitor while a single great image now took 80% of the screen and the sound automatically ramped up to 50 decibels.

It was an official message from the White House, in Washington DC in America, being violently pushed across the planet by the recently instituted automatic censorship software and systems that had given the Papal Lord control over the USA’s private broadcasters for a few short hours this
weekend.

The message was being filmed live from inside the Oval Office, but it wasn't the Lordly Papal Conclave of Bishops, nor even just Trump himself that were the origin of the broadcast.

Dressed in modernized christian crusader clothing of white cotton, wool, kevlar and silvery thermoplastic plates on top, was the vice-president of the USA, Michael Richard Pence. He was seated at the Papal Lord's massive custom wooden throne and desk, which were both covered in blood smears, evidence that something 'juicy' had exploded in the chair, splashing all over and around the area while somebody was sitting in the throne. The 61 year old man looked far older and more fragile than he had ever looked during the last four years in his elevated office. In fact, even at the heart of the embattled second run at the job, he had never seemed so worn out, so dead inside.

The population would soon know why.

"My fellow Americans" he began in a somber, listless tone, "It is my immeasurably sad duty to inform you that our most beloved, our cherished above all others, Donald J. Trump, the man styled Papal Lord Amerikus the First, has succumbed to grievous injuries inflicted to his body. He was assailed most scurrilously, in a fashion only an immoral anti-christian coward could accept, by way of sniping him from a distance through the enclosed walls of the Oval Office. The projectile entered his chest, whence it exploded in a most unholy, unacceptable, act of profanation of his nobly exalted corpus benedictorum, that had been given to him from On High, by Jesus our Lord God the Redemptor, directly without intercessions from man or beast. The foul creature that dealt the fatal deed has committed suicide by immolation, a cowardly act too, rather than face publicly before the Roseanic Chapel assembled the price of his heretical felonies."

Taking a minute to compose himself, it was visible that the old man was shaken to the core, and it wasn't a spectacle or a fake-out like his boss used to put on for donors and voting base. His hands were shaking, his eyes were wet from tears that kept on falling, his lips trembled from the effort of saying words he didn't want to be true, and his entire posture was that of a man broken, someone who had finally seen that the fight was lost.

Mike Pence had genuinely cared for the older man, and followed him due to real belief, not political calculus, unlike many thousands who would have gladly dumped him once he had named his second judge on the Supreme Court. Even inside the Republican side of politics, there had been vast hordes waiting, not so silently, hoping fervently for Team Trump 2020 to collapse and lose the second race so that 'normality and logic' could once again rule the country's top agencies and policy-making.

A multitude of factor conspired to rob them of those hopes: Bob Mueller was taken out so his investigation was dead-on-arrival. Several anti-Trump politicians and officials resigned or were bought off to leave both politics and the country. The popular psyche was carburating on right-fringe anti-government conspiracy theories of the worse sorts. Christian religiosity was unbridled across the land. White racism was now openly peddled in several state or municipal government seats anew. And the entire world structure of NATO and the UN had been trashed, replaced by the end of their first year in office.

Team Trump were the full winners of all they undertook, so much so that even their worst hard-core detractors had to admit the reality, all the while shredding their shirts like the treasonous Pharisee Caiaphas before Pontius Pilate, screaming through the pains of denial, that they were in fact 'redoing the world' along the plans promised in 2016. Very few, however, would ever be privy to just how much of that success was due to the inhumane efforts of Mike Pence as he lobbied the white power movance, the right-wing fringe, the mainstream evangelicals, and several christian denominations who were weary of the extremist apocalyptic preachers Trump had surrounded himself with over
No; no one would ever truly understand the depth of devotion this man had for his leader.

The Japanese would compare it to the relation between a samurai and his shogun; living only to serve, and honored to be allowed to serve such an honored master in such times of turmoil.

Some people were born to lead, to be the beacon of shining hope, whilst others were born to carry that torch aloft across the land, seas and storms so that it's cleansing light shone on the worshipers, bolstering their faith in the Divine Creed yet again. Mike Pence was born so, a simple bearer, and he accepted his position in life with all the honorable humility, and Blessed Grace, that he expressed for all things given him in life by Jesus, the Truly Pure Christian Christ, his Divine Creator. He saw his position similar to the apostles in the Time of Prophecies; he was helpful in the picture, but in no ways was the story about himself or his actions. It was about the God-Made-Flesh in the middle; HE was the reason they were all so much better now. And so, to see this leader, his best friend, his great light of pure undiluted hope laid low, had truly affected him beyond his capacity to express in human words.

But they would know all the same. There were ways other than words...

"I see now. I see it clearly now. With my eyes wide open, illuminated by the glowing purity of Jesus' redeeming light of Truth and Grace! AMEN! I have said AMEN! I see the Light of Salvation at the end of the dark tenebrous passage, through the fiery sulfurous planes of Gehenna! The mere and meek worshipers will be led into the wilds of Perdition, as Moses did with the Jews in the desert, and only the True Faithful will be left at the end of the pilgrimage, martyred unto Exalted Purity, to witness the Godly Mercy of Salvation as they are Raptured into Heaven's ranks of crusading angels! AMEN!"

Looking into the camera with empty, soulless eyes that no longer sought to perceive reality, the vice-president took out a small blue plastic box, a rectangle barely the size of a cellphone but two inches thick, that he placed on the bloodied tabletop before himself. Opening the box's lid without actually looking at it, he gazed pensively at the camera, as if he were actually in the room, speaking with the people at the other end of each line. Shaking his head sideways in a slow, negative movement, the old man turned the box towards the camera so that the contents could be seen by all.

It was an electronic transmitter with a digital countdown, balefully ticking down the last 87 seconds that were visible on it. Mike Pence spoke slowly, softly, devoid of any wrath, anger or any feelings at all. It was the most chilling fact of it all, that total absence of feelings for anything.

"You, the peoples of the Earth, are unrepentant heathens, unbelieving cads, scurrilous knaves and base-born heretics who dwelt lower than the worms in the soil. We have tried... All of us have, but HIM more than any other, to show you the way in the Light of Jesus and his creed. How did you thank HIM? Tell me, curs, how did you thank your Blessed Papal Lord, Amerikus the First? You didn't! You lied about him! You scoured his past in a despicable WITCH HUNT of unimaginable proportions! You conspuated his name, his reputation and his history with nothing but bile and vitriol! He gave his life and part of his soul so that you could all stand tall, atop his grand, broad, titanesque shoulders, small men given a chance to become giants in the eye of God, the way he was! But you spurned him... And in the end of things, you murdered him crassly, without honor or dignity, without even having the courage to stand in his face as you pulled the trigger..."

Looking around with madness in his eyes and erratic movements in his hands, the old man dressed in soldier's clothing, even though he had never served the military in his life, seemed to be mentally too disordered to line up his thoughts anymore. But, he managed one last comment for them to hear.
"You don't deserve it... This city, this nation, the technology and the money, each dollar a solid credible proof of God's Just and Graceful Mercy upon those who clutch them... You don't deserve any of it anymore, you filthy swine who conspire with Jews, Romani, niggers, yellows, browns and all manner of slave-spawns, women and rebellious children out of hand! And so, by the command of my God, as it was left to me personally, spoken by the very mouth of Amerikus the First, in his Last Testament which he had written so... You are to be deprived of this luminous city of wonders, that you cannot hold in the Name of the One and True God, Jesus, of the Christian Bible. Amen, I said! Amen to the Cleansing!"

The Internex signal was changed over to show an outside view, from somewhere south and east, as the municipal infrastructures were destroyed in an instant. The information banner at the bottom of the screen said the signal had to roam for two full seconds before it found a camera functional in the area to show – anything – from the zone affected. It was a surveillance camera mounted high atop a metal pole, in the Point Lookout State Park, on the Point Lookout Lighthouse that guarded the entryway to the Potomac River. The image showed lasted for only four seconds before that signal was lost as well.

There had been three massive spheres of light, exploded at 10 meters above ground, forming a triangle that covered the entire city of Washington DC, blasting, pulverizing, incinerating, irradiating, craterizing and breaking the tectonic plate of the entire zone as it succumbed to the relentless might of nuclear fire. The molten slag of a city collapsed into the river, which rose up in a response-surge tsunami, flooding out of its banks for hundreds of miles both ways, as well as sending up a cloud of hyper-heated steam boiling at several million degrees Fahrenheit as the blast wave, hot air front and sonic boom traveled for three hundred kilometers all around the zone of explosion.

The American capital had just been erased from existence, leaving an irregular, vaguely triangular depression, that would quickly fill with the Atlantic's cold waters as the ocean would now be able to reach that far inland, due to the catastrophically lowered river bed and surrounding land masses.

Washington DC is dead.

The Russians, Chinese and Montagnard leaders were having a secret/classified meeting over the Internex to discuss the current American Madness when the capital city of their greatest rival goes up in flames. You may be surprised to learn that nobody is pleased with that turn of events, and why.

The meeting in the Daleminton Hotel aborts badly when Andrea Dre declares unilateral rights to move Lucas over to SeaQuest to protect him from further madmen and their fanaticism.

An explorative post-portem of the demised city is done by multiple parties, including the SeaQuest which is dispatched to analyze the damages to the oceanic floor, the outer banks and the Potomac river itself. The anti-ICBM satellites are put to profitable use, scanning from above at many angles to produce raw data for analysis, and to take over as comms relays to guide the civil security measures to assist what few survivors will be found past the 300 kilometer perimeter of annihilation.

Plans are finally made to move Lucas, but put on hold until the planetary climate recycling grid has managed to reduce temperatures, restore visibility and tone down radiation as many communications are being heavily impacted by the damages the blasts did to the gases and energy layers around the Earth's protective envelope. Against the desires of everybody, Lucas employs his LEGAL autonomy
equal to a 21 year old, granted by his status at the World Bank, to move himself to his manorial holding of Sault-Sainte-Marie, in Ontario, to pass his birthday and the holiday period in safe, friendly surroundings rather than besieged by strangers.
This is the world we have wrought

The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome. 
Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } --- { WARNINGS & NOTES } --- { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

For this chapter, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?
NINETH CHAPTER; This is the world we have wrought

Secret meetings in the Dark Web

(Gosudárstvennyy gimn Rossíyskoy Federátsii)

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 14:00pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 11:00am
Internex secret channel
Multiple locations; Moscow, Beijing, Seoul

At roughly 2 o'clock in the afternoon, Washington DC Time index, the secret services of three massive and powerful confederations were working diligently to establish and secure an impromptu VPN linkup through a military-grade Tor server in the lowest reaches of the Dark Web. This task was helped along by the fact that the Internex system in question was Tier-3 military usage only, and further segregated from normal tactical traffic/chatter by several layers of proprietary governmental encryptions. This was completed by the need to have a very special adapter box to connect into the normally employed red colored wall socket reserved for Tier-3 military web cabling.

Since the secret services in question had been integral parts of the conception and construction of all parts, programs and building renovations needed by the vast system, you could bet both hands that they could, and would, succeed in their appointed task. Otherwise, their Lords would punish them cruelly, right after their immediate supervisors had done so first.

While publicly declared as democracies by the ruling Council in each confederation, everybody on the face of the Earth knew that to be a massive, transparent lie. While it was true that all the member countries inside each block participating to the secretive conference call had moved away from pure communism towards a looser form of leftist socialism with private property allowed, that didn't make those nations democracies. Furthermore, even a democratic nation would be forced to follow along the drumbeat of the other members once Council votes were tallied and Cabinet directives were issued, so the issue of political regime and philosophy became moot de facto anyways.

{ SQ } --- { A different world than we were born into } --- { SQ }

In late 2017, the Trump administration managed to scuttle the UN charter, causing the collapse of the Assembly and most of International Law for a short period of 7 months before the successor treaty, The United Earths and Oceans Organization was enacted in mid-2018.

It was in the early months of 2018 that NATO was disbanded but never rebuilt. What followed was the birth of the multiple 'confederations' and several 'limited local alliance', or LLA.

New grand alliances emerged from the meltdown;

The Russian Trans-Caucasian Confederation founded in early 2018 regrouped Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. As the biggest member, the richest, and the only one with nuclear weapons, Russia acted as overlord towards the others which it saw as mere vassals that supplied it with cheap resources. Even the other two founding partners and
traditional allies were more-or-less pressured into joining and had only a paltry influence on the overall confederation. The most important elements unifying this alliance were the varied governments' desire to keep societal order and peace, even at the cost of democracy and personal freedoms. This was helped by Russia sweetening the deal with cheap oil and gas, financing the rebuilding of public airfields or naval ports, and selling good military hardware at decently discounted prices compared to the global market. It is important to understand though, just how little trust there actually was between the leaders (and populations) of these countries, even in a good year.

The Chinese Silk Road Confederation founded in late 2018 regrouped China and Mongolia, then Kazakhstan finally joined them barely four months ago, in August 2020. Similarly to Russia, the Chinese government lorded over the two other members since it was several times richer and more populous than them, and its sole possession of nuclear weapons in the block didn't make it any kinder to the junior members. Unlike Russia though, China took its role as 'cultural beacon' quite seriously and thus offered to help Kazakhstan with a large program to build schools and hospitals specifically in the poor and remote regions. This was to be facilitated by the new four-track railway for a new type of double-width / two-storey wagons that would cross all three members of the CRSC. It would start from the city of Aktau on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, going north until Bozoy where it turned east to then pass between the three great water bodies of the depleted Aral Sea, then going on a north-east course to Astana, capital of Kazakhstan. From there, it would go east & south into Mongolia, curving slowly until it reached Ulaanbaatar, capital of Mongolia. From that city, it would go south & east, until the chinese city of Shenyang. Because of old & new treaties, the railway would then split into three major branches. Firstly, east & north to terminate in Vladivostok in Russia. Secondly, south to Pyongyang city, capital of North Korea, then to Seoul, capital of South Korea, to then terminate in Busan. The third and last route would circulate westwards to Beijing, China's capital, then south to Shanghai, then south & west to Hong Kong, then cross into Vietnam to terminate at Hanoi. Plans were already in the works to negotiate building a branch route from the small village of Bozoy in Kazakhstan on to Sevastopol in Crimea through Russian lands. A second branch was being negotiated from Hanoi to reach westwards to Vientiane in Laos, then south & west to Bangkok in Thailand, then due south to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, going down further south to terminate in Singapore where it would pass by the airport and finish at a new ferry terminal in the naval portuary district. The most vital part of the railway proposed was that electricity, potable water, sewers, telephony & Internex cables, weather & security sensors and workers' bunkered shelters would all be laid in the foundation slabs and bridges of the massive system, along with a paved one lane service roadway on each side. The new asphalt was supposed to be both photo-voltaic and thermo-voltaic to feed electricity captured from the environment into the sensors, comms and shelters' life-support all year round. Should this all be built to specs, it would extend the industrial, commercial, economical and cultural shadow of China across all these nations, as they would want to have access to the cheaper central systems offered by Beijing rather than the privately exploited local versions.

The Himalayan Confederation founded in early 2019 regrouped India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka. While the economic and military power of this block was considered only medium strength by conventional terms and the members nations were rather poor, the two founding partners held nuclear weapons, thus stabilizing and protecting the entire ensemble. This did not however have any positive results in the daily lives of their populations who remained dirt poor, had many health problems and little to no education. Added to this are much racism, religious strife between sects holding historical rights, India's caste system that refused to die, and a high quotient of crimes emanating from the sexist bigotry endemic to the founding cultures, and society was not anywhere near getting better for anybody but the ultra rich. Even then, it got better because they could build walled compounds and hire private guards; walking in the streets unprotected was just asking to get mobbed, robbed, and killed; possibly raped as well, regardless of gender or caste. Furthermore, the confederation's leading member, India, had recently elected in 2019
several provincial governors and village councils that were sectarian fanatics linked to the old castes supported by Hindu extremists that preached a return to ancestral superstitions. The ensuing clash of values and flagrantly illegal legislation proposals from these religious zealots caused multiple riots, even causing the collapse of one province when its government building was torched with the fanatics still trapped inside the old wooden edifice. If it weren't for the military high command having stepped in to assume control of several territories under martial law, there is a chance that India would have undergone civil war at that moment. As it was, there was an ongoing, violent and lethal, active purge of these sectarian elements from the positions of power in government, but it would take a few years to see if the intervention was successful.

The Montagnard Confederation founded in early 2019 regrouped Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, The Philippines and Singapore. This group did not seem to have a single country that acted as 'senior partner' contrary to the other confederations. The initial idea for the confederation came from Chi Hoy, president of Vietnam, the alliance's first president named at inception, and political backing from the large banks in Singapore. Unfortunately, the actual foundation treaty was fomented and secretly pushed by the Chaodai, a terrorist organization based on asian (or mongoloid) racial purity, Buddhist orthodoxy, ecological extremism and anti-everybody else creed. They were the asian equivalent of ISIS; they committed several cruel, disgusting acts of rabidly racist violence from February 2020 onwards, when they revealed themselves to the planet. The true extent of the menace had yet to be discerned and addressed by the UEO Council. Two facts were evident from the start: firstly, the Chaodai had their main bases inside Montagnard, specifically on the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea; secondly, they had vehicles and weapons accessible only through official governmental channels thus indicating the group was old, well established in society, and had very high contacts inside the member nations.

The Kim Dynasty LLA founded in early 2019 regrouped North Korea, South Korea and Japan. Nobody knew why in Hell the Japanese had agreed to this deal, but the nuclear weapons in North Korea's hands plus the USA pulling out its troops from the region entirely in late 2018 could have forced the Nippon government into this alliance to save their country from being annexed by China. Another theory being explored is that the Chaodai had exerted occult influence on the elected officials to force the acception of the treaty, in a cruder maneuver than what led to the inception of Montagnard, as that was already in the works for almost six years. As it was, Japan had the economic power & scientific establishment, South Korea had economic & industrial capacity while North Korea held more military capacity & manual laborers than both. The creation of internal free-trade, defense and Internex management treaties allowed the creation of something that could become the 21st century's new 'model' regional power. The current leader, Kim Jong Un, had established commercial and data-flow treaties with Micronesia and its alliance, including for the R&D of sub-sea colonies and military defense posts. The Hyundai shipyards in South Korea have, in 2019-20, built five massive all-purpose hangar ships that the KD-LLA now uses as floating airbases for helicopters, patrol boats and cruise missile batteries to deter hostile entry into their oceanic perimeter. Five more such ships are scheduled for completion by 2022, and Micronesia has ordered four units of the same model to be delivered in the same time-frame.

The Micronesia Confederation founded in early 2019 regrouped Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia, New Zealand, Papua – New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji Islands, Brunei, and hundreds of smaller islands that were barely acknowledged by the UN, or the UEO afterwards. This alliance is important because it has been at the forefront of R&D to conceive floating villages and submerged colonies, especially geothermal or mining installations. Since the year 2010, Micronesia in particular has been very active in developing the hydro-combustion generator which works on a combination of solar panels and raw sea water. The device uses the solar energy to decompose water into oxygen & hydrogen which are then used by a conventional piston engine configured to burn hydr/ox, natural gas, or bio-alcohol. In the same period, Micronesia has bought from its partner
Australia three dozen large floating platforms similar to oil rigs, but without any drilling systems. These platforms have been spread out across Micronesia's national waters to act as military border outposts capable of intervening under the waves as much as above. More worryingly, Micronesia itself has bought an uncertain number of 5th generation ICBM from North Korea, all equipped with Japanese made plasma warheads, dedicated as ship-killers to convince greater nations like America to stay out of those zones they have declared under their control. Theoretically, a single such missile could destroy even the largest aircraft carrier in function, or at least render it barely capable of floating back to port to be scrapped formally. It is obvious to the eyes of experts that deterring the presence of US carriers in the south-Pacific zone has become the number one priority of the Micronesian government since November 2017 when Team Trump's inherent racism and religious fanaticism began to surface visibly. The promise made by V-P Mike Pence to secure the US borders around Hawaii by forcibly christianizing every human that lived on the islands around their important naval station at Pearl Harbor was largely credited by experts as the spark that triggered Micronesia's desire to possess the capacity to commit retaliatory strikes at strategic mobile assets & landmasses.

The European Union (Confederation) was entirely rebuilt at the fall of NATO in early 2019 and now regrouped Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Germany, Liechtenstein, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Italy, Malta, France, Monaco, Spain, Portugal, England, Ireland and Iceland. Due to the collapse of the old Western Block, the 'Brexit' movement imploded and, at the same time, the elderly Queen, the venerable Elizabeth 2nd, died of a brain aneurysm at age 93, thus giving the impetus for emergency elections in January 2019 and the sweeping victory of new pro-Europe MP's. This venomous situation however cost England its chance to be counted as one of the senior founders of the Union, despite holding nuclear weapons like France. It is important to understand that England had also become an important player in the development and manufacturing of undersea colonies, which were also used mostly to delimitate the country's claimed borders on the oceanic floor. None of that was sufficient to move the founders of the alliance who have multiple votes & veto powers on the Council of Europe. Most of the rest of the EU was not particularly involved or interested in sub-sea colonies, nor military maneuvers in those areas. Most of the energies and efforts of the EU are concerted towards managing the constant flow of migrants from the poorer nations of Africa and arabic lands, stabilizing their internal commerce, and patching up a failing societal tissue that has been strained to the breaking point. The presence of the RTCC on their north-east border has mostly been dismissed as a credible threat, given that the Russians are presently far more preoccupied by the Kim Dynasty's latest crazy scheme and the on-off relationship between China and the Montagnard. In fact, the EU is much more worried about Micronesia's attempts to obtain nuclear weapons or America's steady march towards theocracy and a new christian crusade against the world.

The North American Confederation founded at the fall of NATO in late 2018 regrouped America and Israel, plus Canada and Mexico. Yes, the USA's "christian pastors first & always" doctrine was in full play during that decisional process, much to the horror of Canada and Mexico who had no choice at all in accepting the un-strategic membership. They would now inherit the consequences of every idiocy the racist, fanatical white evangelicals did in the name of Divine Prophecy. Trump's miserable excuse that it was just 'a move' to secure the nuclear weapons in Israel from falling to muslim hands, should their population balance shift towards an arab majority, was seen through by everyone as the meaningless racist diatribe it really was. In margin of this, Team Trump bombastically laid claim to the entirety of Groenland which it said would serve to compensate for all that America had overpaid on defending NATO's members since the 1950's. That 'public declaration of seizure' was never recognized by the UEO Council, the European Union, nor even inside the NAC Council itself. Amusingly, the spurious claim was never acted upon by the White House staff or US military, especially after the Israeli government declared itself uninterested in supporting Trump on the matter.
The Amazonian Confederation was founded in mid-2019 and regrouped every country situated south of Mexico in the central and southern parts of the American continental mass. It had a much better central Council and Cabinet than the confederations in Africa and Arabia, but far less military or economic capacity. As such, this group was seen as the vassal/puppet of the NAC, a fact only reinforced by their almost minionesque following of USA policies and diktats. The only real powers inside this alliance were Panama due to the yearly revenue and strategic value of the canal, and Brazil which had recently discovered deposits of ‘rare earths’ and small pockets of radioactive isotopes hidden under patches of jungle that had just been clear-cut by – permitted – logging companies.

The Freedom Communes of the Antilles was a hodge-podge LLA that regrouped Cuba, the Cayman Islands, Haiti, the Bahamas, Dominican Republic and several tens of small barely acknowledged islands that survived only by tourism or Dark Web channeled illegal banking. This alliance has practically no Council to speak of, a figurehead Cabinet that rarely meet face-to-face, and no defensive capacities whatsoever that would scare off anything stronger than a VERY small smuggling ship.

The Pan-African Confederation was founded in late 2018. It was so loosely governed as to be considered legally an LLA rather than a firm reliable treaty with a Council and Cabinet. Every member nation has to be physically situated on the actual African continent, no exceptions tolerated. However, since many countries were in fact in the process of civil unrest, or flat out civil war, and some like Ethiopia and Congo were yet again bereft of any government at all, the decision-making and law enforcement activities of the PAC were very much sketchy and unreliable. The only real jobs of the PAC-LLA were to insure the security of the Suez Canal and protect the fossil fuel deposits from attacks by terrorists and rebels, two occupations that they were hard-pressed to succeed at. In reality, it was an open secret that the PAC was just a thin curtain of civility behind which the national leaders committed crimes, graft, corruption, and political reprisals, including suppressing human rights groups, all the while claiming these were regular governmental law-keeping activities. Nobody believed them, not even the populations on their territories, but they were all too poor and menial for anybody to care enough to act against them to stop the mess. The Country of South Africa was included in the PAC but had little influence since its economic, industrial and military powers were in fact very small compared to the rest of all the african nations united. The fact that the nation was still pretty much in the hands of a white minority irked many on the PAC Council, who were thusly refractory to all proposals & positions of South Africa just because it was the only gesture of disdain they could materialize with tangible effect without devolving into warfare.

The Pan-Arabic LLA was justly named, and managed as such. It had barely managed to coalesce into being at the end of 2019, mostly in response to the formation of the Chinese Silk Road Confederation which was lobbying Kazakhstan intensely, to the point it did join the CSRC in mid-2020. The PA-LLA regrouped Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine (Cisjordania + Gaza Strip), Jordan, Yemen and Oman. Do note that the inclusion of the Palestinians in the treaty was purely symbolic as they do not have any sovereignty that is recognized by the UN or the UEO afterwards. Also, while the confederation members agreed on putting the name in the documents, they never agreed on the means to enforce it, nor how far to take hostile actions to force Israel (and the USA) to relent enough for the treaty to become applicable. The Pan-Arabic Alliance was an abhorrent creation that suffered from bipolarity and schizophrenia from inception. It was based mostly on the old historically arabic lands, plus a twisted view of ‘arab race’ intermixed with the obligation (unverifiable) to be born/converted to Islam. This completely non-functional definition of identity & membership resulted in a collection of countries that are racially and religiously diverse, but under the control of a small group of fanatical muslim ecclesiastes allied with known criminal gangs and terror groups. These LLA governors were in every shape and form as bad as the White Christian Regency in America
and the ISIS group that they were already fighting an open war against. The only real claim to global
power of the PA-LLA came from large fossil fuel deposits which, incidentally, were fast becoming
useless to the point of irrelevance, and control over the highly strategic Bosphorus Straight, also
called the Sea of Marmara, the only waterway into the Black Sea to the Russian ports of Odessa and
Sevastopol. This was critical for the RTCC’s commerce, capacity to project influence, and
movements of armed forces towards the Occident, thus forcing the Russians to pay a yearly ‘open
passageway’ tax to the PA-LLA Council to have the right to pass military ships without causing an
act of war against the neighbors. Russia's alternative is of course to launch from its northern port
cities, but the psychological effects on the European countries and Americans just wasn't the same.

The resulting state of the planet's geopolitics was such;

As things stood, the old communist nations from the Warsaw Pact were reduced to Russia, China
and the Montagnard, but they were united in culture and purposes against US expansionism,
especially their push to finance (white evangelical) christian missionary activities backed by the
country's national army across the planet. Cuba and most south-american countries that were
communist-led had become so poor, chaotic and irrelevant in the geopolitical context that they had
been cut loose from any treaty or obligations that had bound them to the Old USSR.

The Old Western/Capitalist Block from the Cold War was radically butchered, split in two major
groups of the EU and NAC, with the surprisingly officialized partnership of the Kim Dynasty. This
was a subject of great speculation across the Earth, as the NAC's inclusion of Israel, enforced by the
USA as sine qua non to the new treaty, was an ulcer internally and abroad. To date, nobody really
knew what exactly the North Koreans had in mind when they created their group, let alone why they
 sided with the USA's team rather than China or Russia. Suffice it to say that just as the Americans
were happy to no longer fear Kim Jung Un's missiles, the Chinese and Russians were proportionally
displeased by the neighboring menace switching allegiances to integrate not only the financial and
industrial might of South Korea and Japan together, but even allowed US troops to move their DMZ
from the south all the way to their northern border with China, thus putting American missiles and
military ships in striking distance of critical Chinese sites.

The Arabs and Africans were more or less living together in the same oversized, dilapidated house,
when they weren't fighting or causing racial and religious strife in each other's families. The loss of
importance and financial power from petrol products, coal and natural gas was the biggest cause of
concern, unrest, and political changes across all of the member nations in the PAC and PA-LLA,
especially since the SeaQuest had launched with a first generation prototype cold fusion reactor in
2005. The recent revelation of electro-plasmatic generators shook the entire oil industry, from the
wells to the retail stations, and all the way up to the boards of administration in the USA. Alongside
this reorientation for large-scale electrical needs, small-scale engines necessary for mechanical
movement were changing dramatically by the push from poor countries to return to using steam
systems, giving rise to new-age boats, trains and trucks that didn't rely on manufactured
combustibles.

The Amazonians were left aside by everybody since their inherent poverty, lack of precious
resources and the falling prices of oil led to ceaseless peasant riots, revolts, regime changes and civil
war in half the member nations. Only Panama, rich from the thousands of ships passing through its
canal each year, stayed relatively stable, suffering only a few favela riots occasionally. Brazil had
uncovered mineral deposits of important commercial and strategic value in early 2019, but that was
the result of the government allowing a logging company, in exchange of publicly known bribes to
the president, to clear-cut an area that the native tribes considered sacred for close to 3,000 years. This had sparked racial and religious riots that were still happening, and threatened to spill over to other provinces of the vast undeveloped country, turning into a full-fledged civil war. As such, Brazil’s importance as a founding member was severely curtailed, almost to nil in fact, as even the tourists were now avoiding them.

The Micronesians and Montagnard were beginning to collaborate on surveying and regulating sea shipping lanes, improving portuary installations, and building sea-floor pipelines to bring sea-floor natural gas and petrol to the refineries in the surface nations. Worryingly, rumors were circulating that Micronesia was secretly attempting to buy atomic weapons from Pakistan, while India was apparently involved in supplying the scientists to fit the warheads to prototype Mach-4 speed missiles home-built by the small island nation. Given the unstable situations in all the major nations of Earth at this time, nobody has any intelligence operatives inside Micronesia to spy upon or verify these rumors, but they are becoming more frequent with persistence, which is never a good sign.

These situations & movements of philosophy, religion, politics, race, science, technology, economics and armed forces were the backdrop that necessitated holding this unplanned vid-meet by the leaders of the three 'socialist' blocks, in response to the events that had just changed the regime and society of America and its treaty.

{ SQ } --- { Old men bitching at life } --- { SQ }

The signals & comms technicians from the three large national alliances were on schedule, doing the final synchronization of the automated translation programs necessary since neither of the principals in the vid-meet spoke the same language. The linguistics matrix had to translate vocal and written at the same time so that if a misunderstanding occurred, the leaders could simply read the scrolling print-out of the conversation appearing on a smaller monitor under the large conference-sized screen.

This meeting was so secret that there wouldn't be any translators in the room or online, and no bodyguards either. Since each leader would be ensconced deeply in an armored concrete bunker under his very own seat of power, neither felt fear at being alone for two or three hours of conversation where the most violence they would face would be emotional jabs from the neighbors.

The lines came alive and the three confederation leaders were now visible to each other.

Vladimir Putin, age 68, president of Russia, was a lawyer who lived and studied in Leningrad, then joining the KGB where he acted as an intelligence officer for 16 years. In 1991 he recycled himself into politics, moving to Moscow to join the central administration. In 2000 he won his first election as president of Russia, which he stayed until 2008. The 2008 election was won by a man widely recognized as a crony of Putin, who promptly named the outgoing president as prime minister, thus instituting what became known as the 'tandemocracy' of Russia. Due to nefarious constitutional changes of his own manufacture, Putin was able to get elected as president again in 2012, and yet again in early 2018. His career is characterized by distributing bribes, gifts and privileges liberally to oligarchs while maneuvering the new secret service, the GRU, to intimidate, extort or kill off his rivals, and occasionally those who made his rich allies antsy.

Xi Jinping, age 67, president of China, was a lawyer and politician from his youth. He had been exiled in a rural area as a teenager because his father was purged from his positions when a change of power occurred in the capital. After living in abject poverty for a few years, he managed to attend university and succeeded in graduating, thereby obtaining access to the rest of society. He washed off his father's stain on his name by entering the Communist Party as a low-level civil servant, then rising steadily without any scandals until he achieved the presidency of the nation in 2013. He has monopolized power, gathered multiple functions, and assigned himself as chairman of several
decisional committees, all to become overlord of China in everything but the name. His biggest coup was having the CCP change the country's constitution to name him as president for life, essentially empowering a monarch in all but name. Since 2015, Xi has committed several purges, and routinely enacts 'anti-corruption' investigations through the civil servants or military that result in hundreds of demotions and disgraceful retirements for people who had been close to previous governments.

Chi Truong Phu Hoy, age 75, president of Vietnam, was born as a poor peasant người Thượng, or Degar, an ethnic tribe native to the central mountainous highlands of Vietnam. It is from their place of dwelling that the French colonist named all these tribes under the common appellation 'Montagnard' which means 'person living/working in mountains'. That is the reason for the name of the confederation; because it regroups a number of mountainous nations where each peak had its small ethno-cultural tribe for thousands of years, and they are all united by their survival against repeated attempts at violent colonization by Europeans, Russians, Chinese and Japanese. President Chi was a poor logging laborer until age 17 when he was awarded a charitable scholarship by the French Embassy to study medicine in France because he saved the lives of tourists struck by a flash flood during the monsoon season. He spent a year of intensive catching-up to get his secondary diploma then spent 6 years to get his medical diploma and right of practice. He returned to his family in Vietnam where he practiced medicine in his village for thirty-three years, until age 59, when he was invited by officials in the central government to join them to help guide the country's renewal of its medicinal laws and institutions. From then on he climbed the ranks until he was elected president of Vietnam for the first time in 2017, at age 72, his first elected position in career. He was seen as the only logical, pragmatical choice to head the Montagnard Confederation since it was his brainchild which he had worked to create since his return from France. He was widely viewed as the least violent, least temperamental, and least corrupt of the three since he had no history of extortion or political purges to date.

{ SQ } --- { Video conference begins } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 14:11pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 11:11am

Chi; "Gentlemen, I bid you good day. I trust the weather isn't too cold in your domains?" he quipped with a small discrete smirk.

Putin; "Chi, you old hill goat... You know full well what a muscovite winter feels like. I'm snowed in so badly that I need a BTR-80 just to get back to the presidential residence. And the stupid peasants aren't even intelligent enough to get out of the way when they see an 8-wheel tank rolling at them! My countrymen are either born imbeciles or too drunk to care, the байстрюк!"

Xi; "I must admit that the passing winter has not been kind in Beijing. I am lucky everything is located inside walking distance through covered corridors. At my age, the cold winds do me no favors to be thankful for. No wonder you refuse to come visit me, despite the repeated invitations since you took office. I too would prefer tropical rain to a blizzard, if I were given the choice."

Chi; "But you do have the choice, my old friend. You could retire and move to Taiwan at long last. There, you would be blessed by permanent tropical climes that your joints would be quite satisfied with. And your wife would be much happier too, given the artistic and theatrical venues on the island territory."

Putin was pouring himself tea from a battered old sterling silver samovar that had belonged to Stalin, smirking amusedly at the kindly suggestion to 'take a hike' Jinping had just received from their southern counterpart. He would be happier if the cagey leader of China were to retire. Or have an accident. He was far too similar in mindset to himself for the Russian leader to feel at ease while the
other man sat on a lifelong presidency. Not, of course, that he had that much leeway to point fingers, but his opinion had to be worth something, nyet?

Xi grumbled dismissively as he sipped his own aromatic tea, already in hand before the meet began. He knew his dream of Putin choking on his drink was unrealistic, but 'hope springs eternal' as the proverb goes, and he wasn't getting younger. He needed all the positive thinking he could get, and there was pitifully little of that left. As for Chi, the hairy mule could go graze on his palm trees and see how that made him feel. Retire to Taiwan indeed! He was still healthy enough to last another twenty years as president, he would most certainly not be going anywhere, and definitely not while that backwoods spawn was still in office.

Chi was amused, as he always was in diplomatic meetings. His career as a medical doctor had gifted him with superb people-reading skills, which made interpreting the moods and situations of people involved in a conference always entertaining. What? He was old, worn out by a hard life, and ready to hang his lab coat for good. His wife was the same age, but getting sicker every month, and he dearly wanted to spend her remaining time with her, not in these useless vapid meetings. However, his conscience would not let him retire as long as the other two pseudo-emperors were in power with their vast military so slavishly following them. If only the UEO could truly live up to its promises, instead of being just a different shade of the same white European/American colonial corruption.

Putin; "Tell me Chi, has your grandson finally dispensed with that deplorably sub-par french woman he was shacked up with last year? If he absolutely wants to marry a European, I can recommend several russian women from Moscow, each bred with a long familial history and far superior pedigree. And they wouldn't be marrying him for his money or access to your office by a back-channel, either."

'Not when a russian GRU agent should be the one doing exactly that' Putin thought as he smiled vapidly at the other two men, while they graced him with matching deadpan looks.

Dismissively, Chi answered; "Thank you for your heartwarming concerns towards my humble grandson. I will pass your generous offer along to his parents."

'And make certain it lands in the waste basket besides my desk before he's ever aware of it' the older man thought, wondering again why he was entertaining any sorts of relationship with this ill-mannered drunken boar. Ah, yes! Diplomacy. It was an obligation of his office. Damn!

Xi; "How deplorable of you, Chi. I have made the same offer the last three times we spoke. I have several nieces and grand-nieces still unmarried that would be far better suited to the intellectual soul of your grandson. Why should he look so far outside his kin, when so many are willing and able?"

Chi; "I'm afraid he takes after me and his father quite honestly, given we both married women from France. It has become somewhat of a family tradition by now."

Synchronous snorts of derision met that last retort. He really hadn't put any effort in it.

The three old men bickered and dithered, poked and prodded, jabbed and deflected for about a half-hour more as they had the time and safety to indulge. It wasn't like their own alliances were falling apart, unlike the real subject of their meeting. Eventually though, they had to talk business.
Xi; "So, the Americans? What do we do about this latest depravity?"

Chi; "If we must, then, by all means, let us discuss the aberration."

Putin; "Why else do you think we are here, Chi? Because we like each other that much? I have rebels with more personality than you in my gulag. In fact, some Chechens come to mind..."

Xi; "Enough banter. This is not a family dinner in a telenovella. You have both seen what they did yesterday morning? How they tortured some of their most loyal and upstanding citizens for no reason but to assuage the miserable vanity of that fickle media slut Trump? These – 'inquisitors' – did push the spectacle to all available channels and websites they could usurp through software hijacks. Even our automated censoring array was overwhelmed so much that we weren't able to block the film from passing along to our populace unfiltered. There have been millions of complaints, comments and fearful supplications coming into our ministries, asking the authorities for confirmation, reassurances, and even for revenge and retaliations against these depraved monsters. It seems that many in my country have forgotten that the USA has well over 6,500 nuclear weapons on hand, and they would not be an easy target for such punitive measures."

Putin; "I am aware of the mess they are making of their homeland, but unimpressed. They have been treating each other that way for nearly 400 years, and longer if one counts their roots in the old European countries that spawned them. The weakling buffoon Trump was destined from the very beginning to be the dismantler of the USA. The few times I met him face-to-face left me wondering how such an unstable, unreliable moron was ever elected to a position of such elevated power. Then, I read the GRU reports about the widespread racism and religiosity across America, and things became clear. Even the inclusion of Israel in the NAC no longer surprises me, unlike back when it happened. That had been a shock, yes. But, in retrospect, we should all have expected that move from Trump given who financed his first campaign. Nonetheless, his team had made several critical mistakes that guaranteed the collapse of his new Papal Lordship before the end of the week. Then when the bank servers began following the fraudulent orders to drain and pauperize the churches and affiliated worshipers... Well, the end is already in progress. His own priests are already abandoning the system they wrought, with the soldiers following suit. This 'White Christian Regency' regime has no future in this world."

Xi; "I concur, and gladly so. Our intelligence services have concluded that the internal damages done by the automated attacks on the finances of institutions and individuals has effectively reduced America to the level of a third world country for the coming 30 to 50 years. This, of course, is aggravated by their simultaneous religious and youth revolts across all levels of society, including rich whites, which will set back the recovery timeline to a full century at the shortest. The USA will not last the week to celebrate their precious 'Risen Christian God' this year, let alone impose it on the planet by force as Trump's voting base wished for viscerally. I must admit that if a single thing about this entire debacle is good, the collapse of this miserable excuse for a faith system and its invasive tentacles is it."

Chi; "I can understand you both feel unconcerned by the military aspects of the problem, given that the national armies of the USA are now mostly defunct, or without credible guidance. You both have nuclear weapons and vast armies to repel Trump's crusaders, should the fools try to beach your shores. But, in counterpart, are you not worried about the full reach of this cybernetic attack against all sects and worshipers? My ministry of finances has informed me that several thousand individuals and over a hundred organizations have already been devastated inside Vietnam, ten times that number across Montagnard. Forget not that we are quite early in this game, too. Those numbers will worsen rapidly as the fraudulent orders cascade through the public servers and then the private systems. Do you not fear a destabilization in your territories, when the people begin to riot in protest against their enforced poverty and shaming for having been worshipers of a cult?"
Putin; "Russia is officially atheistic, as written in the constitution since Lenin. As for the reality of the banking system being attacked... We know who did it, and why. Governor Desdensky of the World Bank has already told me the facts of it, this morning, just after the UEO Cabinet was informed. I could retaliate, of course. So could you, or any other so informed. But the person responsible would commit reprisals far worse than break a few churches and duly chastise church-mongers as they deserve. One does not go to war against a biochemist lightly; the end is never a victory. And that is another point; I do not actually disagree with the man's goals, nor his methods. He was targeted personally by Trump for enslavement or extermination as he is jewish, a doctor of multiple medicines, and quite the virulent atheist. The fact that he was so rich at such a young age also did not make him any friends. The evangelicals wanted him dead, and Trump had to deliver if he wanted to stay in office, just like he had to create that imbecilic theocracy to keep his voters lined up obediently behind him."

Xi; "I do not share your detachment from the situation, Vladimir. In the past 50 years, the Americans have made several sustained attempts to shove both evangelical christianity and white anglo-saxon superiority upon our populations. They went so far as to use the 'human rights' angle to try and force law changes when we stopped them from smuggling sectarian books at our borders. Our recent upgrades to the central Internex management softwares, along with our alliance treaty clauses for such, have become too much for their churches to bypass. Hence, they tried to create a collaboration between churches and their military's cyberwar division to punch their way into our Internex segments. We will not tolerate this act of war against our sovereign territory. The chinese people have always controlled and subordinated religion and priests to the common good of the nation, never tolerating that monks defy or supplant the established monarchs, nor the civilian officials. We will not change this traditional policy, no matter how many church-whores cry on the shoulders of Washingtonian politicians. However, my police and military are well aware of the millions of 'secret' worshipers of the crucifix hidden in our midst, receiving moral support, and oftentimes monies or materials, from American clergy to build secret worship groups inside our borders. They grow inside our society like parasites, but we can do little to truly curb this infection. The worse thing is, they are so numerous already that if these credulous peasants do revolt when their bank accounts are drained, they could actually inflict severe damages to the rest of society around them, simply by the sheer mass of their combined gullible stupidity let loose."

Chi; "Our governments forgot the old wisdom: 'A desperate man is rarely rational, but a fanatic who is proven his myth is false will always resort to violence to fight off the reality that disproves his claims'. The proverb of our ancestors spoke truth, as always. The presence of so many religious peons in our countries is our own fault. We were the adults in charge, and yet we let diseased, criminalized strangers into our homes. We should have refused them passage. We should have culled this evil root before it flowered into such a gangrenous creeping vine that we cannot incinerate it, for fear of burning down the entire edifice. We wanted to move away from totalitarian regimes to avoid civil wars and revolts like the 1920's and 1940's saw across the planet, but are we any better today? Now, we have this socially transmitted mental illness that ravages our nations to deal with, and the only applicable solution is neither simple nor without its own damaging consequences for all involved, including us at the top. What do you suggest we do, short of shooting every worshiper we find?"

Xi; "Unfortunately, the methods are few and rarely fare well in the long term. For now, we have to repress, forcibly and permanently, all manifestations and protests seeking to compensate the pauperized worshipers with state money or tax credits. They have to be acknowledged publicly as the mafious organizations that they truly are, and our ministries must treat them as such in all circumstances. Any attempt by the credulous believers of any sect to change laws to obtain some sort of 'exalted moral status' above the rest of society under the affirmation that 'God blessed us more than others' as compensation for the torts suffered from this cybernetic attack must be fought off and
punished severely. In parallel, we must work together to define a common legal, political and social context by which the entire population will follow the leadership of civilian authorities, with the churches and ecclesiastes being obliged to walk in-step or be disenfranchised, going so far as to jail and execute them if they revolt in any way. Then, we will have to try and convince as many national or confederation leaders as we can to adopt our plan to establish a common front. At this point, we must consider religion like a contagion, and religiously motivated people are the vermin that spreads it. They must be blockaded or exterminated, else our nations and our world will collapse as well."

Putin; "Трахни меня тяжело! It's at times like these that I thank the Orthodox Church for having survived the Stalinist purges and the communist era. They are a tatty garment worn to the threads and too ugly to tolerate, but they still have their uses, if handled with caution. Like rat poison. Bleh! If my population didn't have its own version of the cross to worship, they would be vulnerable to this american purulence, right alongside their music, films, dances and disgustingly fat, oily foods. It's bad enough that we have to tolerate McDonald's and Starbucks, but to think they want to force the international economic trade agreements to consider religion as a 'tradable commodity' so as to have an open door right into the minds of our populations! The nerve of these foul creatures!"

Xi pointed venomously; "Don't you have a few million protestant christians of all sorts spread across your vast state? I recall that many of their evangelical sects do not consider the russian orthodox faith to be genuine christianity, the same way they say anybody not themselves is false or heretical. Wouldn't they constitute a sizable block of troublemakers to contend with, regardless of the combined orthodox and atheist majority?"

Putin drained his tea then set the cup down firmly; "Curse you for speaking too much, Xi. You will drive me to drink, despite the early hour. And yes, you nosy old dog, our Motherland has been physically and spiritually violated by the presence of these sectarian trash since before the fall of the tsars. We are simply better at keeping tabs on them, and making the agitators disappear in the gulags. There is a truly utilitarian reason for why I never cared that Russia lost the status of 'democracy' in the early 2010's, when the UN was gasping its last noxious breaths. As a tyrant with a KGB past, nobody is truly surprised that I employ heavy-handed or brutal tactics, so they stopped doing anything about it but sending pesky emails that the SPAM filters delete for me. In fact, with Trump elected, a large part of the planet has shifted to the right and begun to question the validity, or desirability, of democracy as a regime, when compared to what our own nations have accomplished under our rule. Consequently, I do not think that our strict enforcement of anti-sect laws will attract that much negativity from those countries that still function. The worse peddler of such religious idiocy was the Americans for most of the 1900's, and they are now a comatose corpse for the foreseeable future."

Chi; "You raise an interesting point, Vladimir, about the loss of credibility and desirability of democracy in the public eye. What you fail to mention though, or perhaps perceive, is that almost every national or ethnic group that undergoes that shift expresses the opinion that more freedom for privately organized religion, or worse, state mandated religiosity enforced by police, are the only alternatives that would permit the society in question to 'evolve towards better'. You have seen the example in action with the Americans for decades already, plus a spill-over of this in several local elections across Canada and Europe, all in the last 4 years, since Trump's elevation empowered the uncouth and bigoted. Do you think these countries' populations will still favor that religious primacy after yesterday's debauched spectacle? Or at the end of the week when the USA lies in mortal repose, dead from the toxic shock of self-inflicted sectarian imbecility?"

Xi; "Snort! Spoken like a doctor, always in terms of organics, infections and diseases. Not that I disagree in the least where sects and religion are concerned! But, you are somewhat predictable in that regard, my old neighbor."
Putin refilled his tea cup, stirring in honey as he answered; "And amusing too. But his reasoning cannot be set aside so easily. The old hillbilly has more truth than tort in his words, and I will admit that I have some worries about potential revolts. Russia and its allies have already wasted too many years to pacify the muslim threats inside our borders, adding the christians to the lot does not make me happy. We too, would like a solution more permanent and less simplistic than just shooting or jailing each fool devotee we find. Unlike Kim Jung Un and his forefathers, the idea of keeping multiple generations of the same family in jail does not appeal to my more strategic sense of how we should use our resources."

Chi offered wisely; "You could copy the French; their idea of a Foreign Legion is not bad. But instead, you make it a system separated by faith group, isolated geographically to fight only against one of the other groups so they don't sympathize with the enemy. Let's say, you place christians in Chechnya to fight muslims, and muslims in Crimea to repel Europeans if it becomes necessary. You see the idea?"

Xi quipped; "Why, exactly, am I not surprised you that you are preaching a French solution?"

Putin snarked; "Because he has become predictable that way too, in his dotage."

{ SQ } --- { The death of turpid hopes } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:12pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:12pm - noon

At exactly 15:12pm on Washington DC's clock, the Internex, television and radio systems of the world received an emergency broadcast emanating from the Oval Office of the White House. It was broadcast by vice-president Mike Pence, who was dressed in some sort of modern-day crusader styled clothing that looked caricatural in the eyes of anybody not a white christian devotee from America. That meant about 7,75 billion people out of Earth's 7,78 billion living humans. America's WASP were truly that small of a minority, even though they thought they ruled the planet unlimitedly and eternally.

They were wrong.

The news that held people's attention until the end was that Donald J. Trump, self-styled Papal Lord Amerikus the First, had been killed by a sniper yesterday, after his Low Mass had deteriorated into an open-air riot. You knew it was bad when a tyrant saw his own putsch turn against him in the same week that he had just declared his usurpation of society.

The second news to grab people was that the entire White Christian Regency had already collapsed before it could get any traction to get anywhere.

Mike Pence's message was critically short, ominous, exuding depression, despair, and a morbid finality that nobody understood.

Until the channel went dead in a flash of white light.

Then all the planet's networks began broadcasting military alerts and civil defense orders to assume sheltered positions for the next 24 hours. Automated travel advisories normally used to warn tourists away from monsoons or tornadoes were sent to every device available to reroute people away from all of North America, especially the eastern seaboard. It only took precious few minutes for the automated algorithms in the Internex Mappe Mundia servers to roam across what was left of the American network to connect with a functional traffic camera to show the event.
Washington DC had exploded in nuclear fire.

It was a man-made disaster of planetary proportions.

Somebody had suicided the biggest military and nuclear power on Earth, condemning its already impoverished, beaten, starving, agonizing populace to rapid extinction.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:20pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:20pm - noon

Xi exclaimed, sounding unhinged; "What in the names of the Blessed Ancestors have these accursed – untouchables – done this time? Tell me what calamity they have visited upon us now!"

Putin replied, his voice thick with defeat; "They have done to themselves what I threatened them with for decades. But I never meant it for real! It was just verbal pushing, to get my points across their thick skulls! Now, the damned Cossacks blew up their own nation back to the stone age. All by themselves, without any help! Boum! In a flash of glory... Well, not glorious so much... And now, we have a bigger mess to clean up than their idiotic commercial war they had going on with everybody."

Chi commented toxically; "It sounded more like a wet firecracker from where I am. And I fail to see anything glorious about this debacle. All of us will be stuck holding the bucket on this one, since they're all dead and well past caring anymore! Bleh! Why did I accept this post? If I were retired already, I could limit myself to caring for my wife and family, let the young and foolish handle this horrendous catastrophe by themselves! It would be no less than they deserve!"

Putin; "While I can agree that the younger generation should be the ones stuck with this, since they are the ones who will benefit the most, WE are still alive and suffering this event as well. Since we have the actual reigns of power in our grasp, it behooves us to do – something – before another idiot appears out of thin air, with a head full of ideas about how to manage our problems for us."

Xi whispered hoarsely; "Enough is bloody well enough! Can't these parentless bastards without a proper family name stay in their own dump-yard? WE allowed them to live and forage amongst their own garbage without taking issue at their unnatural uncouthness up to date, and this is how they repay our patience? With damages to the ecosphere and collapsing global commerce? Enough, dammit all! We have had enough! The People of China are patient and benevolent, but there is a finite limit to the virtues of even the saints amongst the golden clouds! We are not funeral steles to just stay planted there, immobile and unreactive, in the face of such diabolical ineptitude! What kind of imbecilic, moronic, incompetent buffoon of an – invisible – did they put in charge of their weapons? NOBODY leaves nuclear weapons unsecured! Not even the Kim Dynasty in North Korea were ever so amateurish as to do THAT!"

Before any of the other two could reply to president Xi's tirade, all three were rudely interrupted by loud knocking on their armored doors, with emergency alarms going off throughout the compounds where they were located. With synchronized sighs, the three leaders muted their vid-meet channel to attend the headless chickens that served as their subordinates because they were panicking and
needed an adult to hold their hands.

Was there ANYBODY in their damned countries that was old enough, and mature enough, to decide something by himself without receiving permission? Did the communist purges of the early and mid 1900's really kill off any potential for intellect and usefulness in their populations? Somebody, somewhere, had to do something about this congenital stupidity; it was just too much to bear anymore.

Video conference continues anew:

Vladimir Putin had gotten a bottle of Stolichnaya Elit vodka that he was pouring into a small glass with the air of a man that knew how to drink fast and hard without remorse.

Xi Jinping had uncorked an old bottle of Gujing Gongjiu that was crafted before the Revolution of Mao and seemed to be filling his second shot glass already.

Chi Hoy now had a small tabletop cast iron brazier with blazing charcoals in it. The flames were gently licking the underside of an iron teapot as he was pouring in a generous dose of imported French La Fontaine de La Pouyade; Cognac - Grande Champagne, Premier Cru, as if it were cold milk.

The old doctor's gesture was so damned incongruous that it forced the other two national leaders who bore witness to pause their own stress induced libations to contemplate just how unsettled the older man must be. How could he otherwise justify desacrating such a tasteful, important liquor by diluting it as a menial tea aromat instead of an ordinary Napoleon VSOP or even a Courvoisier, or in fact anything else. Didn't he have any cheap whiskey for that? Bloody entitled snob! The La Pouyade cognacs were a special house reserve, sold in small numbers every year, and at roughly 2,000 Euros per unit, drowning the noble spirit in tea was a sacrilege for connoisseurs. And pretty much everyone else, too, come to think of it.

Putin, as he filled his third glass, said tartly; "Don't bother with us, Hoy, we'll get along just fine without you and whatever depraved witch juice you're preparing in that flaming cauldron. La Pouyade in tea! Even I, who am not the most appreciative of these fancy spirits, can tell that your concoction will not be what earns your confederation better relations with France. If anything, you're liable to offend them badly enough that they stop exporting their liquors to your country."

Xi snorted inelegantly in his second glass, practically empty as it was; "Or they will go to war. The French take their liquor crafting quite religiously, and you could spark off a sectarian conflict with the citizens of the Champagne terroir. Wouldn't that be amusing? The Americans nucleate themselves into a lower level of crass debasement, whilst the French start their own holy war about the proper arts of tasting their eldest spirits. Given how ridiculous the occidentals are, I could see it happening."

Chi responded glibly, all the while keeping his eyes and focus on his precious delight; "Oh, I am quite capable of heating my fortifying beverage while listening to your inane prattle. It's not like I never heard old women, sitting besides the village fountain, gossiping away at anything more important than the pair of you. Given the state you are both in, I'm certain that anything I miss will not be vital enough to even merit being written down, much less be acted upon when we conclude the conference. Besides, I see the age of that bottle, Jinping, and I know that liquor for having bought a few, last decade. Pulling back on the Emperor's Tribute Water as if it were your mother's milk? Oh,
the shame! Even Vladimir has better manners than to use a ritual libation to assuage his natural penchant for depression."

Putin sighed aloud as he poured his fourth glass; "Perhaps gentlemen, we could bypass each other's drinking habits to discuss the situation at hand? Our planetary neighbor has just committed bloody societal suicide, then kindly left us the mess to clean up. What do we do now?"

Xi shrugged carelessly like a peasant boy, flinging back his fifth glass as he did. Then, looking in surprise at the half-empty bottle, he blinked interrogatively at the crystal container, wondering how he had managed to drink all of that so fast. He was a rather sober character, usually. Half a liter of alcohol at 50% strength wasn't his usual style of soft fruity dinner wines. For the moment he ignored his colleagues as they were speaking nonsense anyways. Setting the cork in the bottle, he put it aside in favor of another cup of tea and some small creamy cakes decorated with icing to resemble traditional junks that used to sail the Yellow River back in the pre-industrial age.

Chi finally took his first cup of mood stabilizing tea, inhaling deeply the aroma before drinking half the contents in one go. Swirling it around his mouth a bit, he swallowed then drained the rest in a second mouthful the same way. He refilled his cup, holding it in his right hand while the left took up some backed puffed-rice snacks whenever he started to get fidgety.

It took almost a quarter hour for the three leaders to have stabilized and recovered enough of their personal equilibrium to whelm their political façade back in play. It wasn't good enough. If you had the least little bit of experience at watching speakers during public conferences, you could see the cracks in those façades, and the nervous ticks they had each lost control of.

Putin sighed loudly, passing a hand over his weary face. "We are on the cusp of a breakdown of the planet's financial system. No matter what comrade Desdensky at the World Bank wants us to believe, the USA had already done incredible damages to us by converting into an impromptu theocracy. Then they collapsed unto themselves, imploding into civil war against their young, women and non-whites altogether. That civil war, in itself, would have been enough to cause a worldwide crash, even without the anti-sect hack. But all of it together... Who will pay the debts? Russia has treasury bonds from diverse American governments. What are they worth, now? Who will reimburse them, if we want to sell them?"

Xi was on the verge of apoplexy as he responded "No one. Not a single soul out there will want to buy these wads of decorative toilet paper! China has bought several billion dollars worth of US treasury bonds, and just like you and others, we are stuck with hands full of ash! No one, not NAC, not UEO, not the World Bank, nobody will pay for these pieces of offal! It is our countries that are now deficitary, and broke, without any issue in sight. How will we fill up this immense hole in our national finances? How can we get paid for these debts when the population that emitted them is dead and long passed caring?"

Chi posited glibly "We could still be repaid, if simply not in our lifetimes. Given enough time, effort, and international assistance, the Americans could repopulate their land, rebuild their economy, and pull out of this apocalypse like the Europeans and Russia did after World War II. The real problem is not the capacity to repay or the timeline involved. No; the real problem is convincing the new government to recognize and honor the debts emitted by the old administrations. Given how devastated they are, all their economy will be locally centered, geared towards subsistence and familial survival only for at least a century. After that period of societal reconstruction has passed and a new governmental order has been solidified, those in power could, possibly, be petitioned for repayment of the bonds. However, no one can tell in advance if they will reimburse their creditors, nor what kind of government they will be, nor what honesty these persons will have. Technically, the bonds are still valid for now, but practically, you are both correct in assuming that we could never
be repaid. Our countries are therefore in dire financial straights, given how much we had lent the
USA, thinking the returns would be good."

Putin gestured vaguely with his left hand, sloshing the vodka in his glass as he did; "Let's all be
honest here. We're now broke like the rat catchers that eke out a pittance in the trash heaps of
Dharavi. Between the US bonds devaluing to the status of outdated newsprint from last century
and the cyber attack against the finances of all churches and ecclesiastes, we no longer have any
stable currency to base international trade on since the UEO Credit was based on parity with the US
dollar and the Euro. Within days, all confederations will all be reduced to barter with gold or material
goods in hand. All loans, mortgages and credit systems will be defunct. But given how reliant all of
us are on electronic payments and international credit scores... Even large resource-rich groups like
ours will be pauperized for the foreseeable future. I just don't see how our national economies can
recover from all these blows without some sort of outside intervention."

Xi shook his head vehemently, raging aloud at the situation. "The People of China cannot and will
not let this come to pass! We will not allow our country to be returned to the poverty, ignorance and
destitution of the pre WW-II days! We will not return to what was before the Revolution! Our
citizens have suffered enough under the imperialists of Europe, Japan and then Mao's not-so-hidden
follies, we will not descend to such madness again! If I have to print money on plastic chits like a
casino in Vegas to make the planet accept Chinese currency and bonds as reliable, then so be it! Our
nation had solid numerical money long before the Europeans came to our shores, we will do so
again, and be damned the Internex, Paypal, Bitcoin, and every other accursed thing that doesn't come
out of our own bank!"

Chi replied blithely "That will not work, and you know it, Jinping. Printing more of our own
currency will simply make us look not only weak, but self-deluded and incompetent. After every
war, any government that tried to just print more money saw hyper-inflation in the 10,000% in mere
weeks. How can you afford a loaf of stale bread, when it costs over 500,000,000 of local money?
How can you rebuild when your national currency has absolutely no value on the world market, like
Germany saw happen after World Wars I & II? Be realistic, man. Our only good chance is to bolster
an existing currency that is independent from our own countries, like the UEO Credit. Both of you
know that there is not enough gold, silver, other metals or gems, available to cover the dollar-amount
that the planetary economy is calculated at. We cannot avert the catastrophe, not anymore. But we
can soften the blow, and shorten the duration of the rebuilding process. However, the only thing that
will suffice to do this is an artificial money, an electronic currency that all nations already recognize
as legally valid inside their borders. If all countries of the Earth agree to scrap their own local monies
and adopt the single planet-wide system, we eliminate both post-war hyper-inflation and market
speculation together in one move. At the same time, we make the UEO responsible for refunding the
bonds and loans from countries that default due to wars, natural catastrophe, or civilization collapse.
This would then allow all our peoples to rebuild on an equal footing, regardless of whether old debts
are repaid or voided."

The other two leaders were silent, deep in reflection on the proposal their colleague had offered for
consideration. It had a certain elegance in the simplicity of switching the current monies with a new
one, just like the Europeans had done with the Euro in the late 1990's. On top of that, if they offered
a conversion premium, like 2-for-1, this would take the poorest a bit out of their misery while
keeping the rich well endowed and well above the rest of the populace as they desired to be. With
both the elites and the working masses profiting from the scheme, this could be turned from a
hecatomb into a very slight victory over humanity's collective stupidity. As Chi had said, not a single
government had ever managed to make the world markets 'swallow without choking' the decision of
printing more money, other than a small yearly trickle to replace worn out or destroyed bills. Even
then, the replacement process was closely monitored by the World Bank and International Monetary
Fund to make certain that no extras were silently put in circulation to bolster the limited fiscal means
that were the curse of all societies.

Putin griped aloud "We will give your advice some thought. In the meanwhile, we should concentrate on what we can actually affect and redirect. Namely, the eventual riots caused by the collapse of the churches and ensuing pauperization of millions of our citizens. On this, I must bid you farewell until next week at the earliest. My subordinates are panicking outside the door. Again. By listening to them, you would think the world was ending today!" he quipped in gallows' humor.

Xi sneered angrily as he deadpanned "If only it were so simple. I could sit with my liquor in peace, knowing that nothing would get any worse for it. But, no! The world will actually keep on going, and if I don't leave this room to hold their hands, my idiot employees will manage to make everything worse and I will be the one stuck with the cleanup! Why do I bother, anymore?"

Chi sipped some warm enhanced tea in silence, content in the knowledge his words of wisdom had been sowed in fertile ground. He pushed the 'off' button to close the conference, having still enough dignity and sobriety to not comment in public on the limited capacities of his underlings, unlike the two drunkards on the screen. Juvenile runts, the pair of them. Where was the strong, coherent, leadership the planet needed it this time of turmoil?

The death of an Era

(Frederic Chopin – funeral march)

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:12pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:12pm (noon)
All over the zone
Washington DC, Maryland, USA

The city was now a deep irregular hole in the sea shore, a rough triangular indent in the planet's crust that dug so profoundly that it cracked the tectonic plate, exposing the magma for a few minutes until it was covered by landslides of molten rock from the collapsing landmasses all around. The depth of the blast shafts had come close to initiating pyroclastic events, that is the creation of multiple eruptive volcanoes right where once sat Virginia and Maryland.

The wind patterns, strength, humidity and particle density in a zone of 100 kilometers around the blasts were all modified in fractions of seconds, temporarily changing from a cold snowy winter into a deep summer haze of warm smog, dry sweltering hot sweeping winds, and almost no sunlight visible from all the thick pollution clouds gathering around the event.

The cold merciless waters of the Potomac River and Atlantic ocean were already rushing to fill in the trench, boiling savagely as they touched the super-heated molten bedrock of the cataclysmic injury in the eastern flank of the continent. This elevated an instantaneous storm cloud filled with hot water, heated expanding gases, fine (and not so fine) dust and particulates, all joining to form a localized, non-moving typhoon that rapidly rotated on the spot without leaving the trench where it seemed to be rooted.

The typhoon caused such a suction of water in the area that the cold flows, barely recovering from the compression wave that passed through them, were dragged back violently towards the titanesque column of swirling flames, air and trash, being sucked up the ionized, magnetically charged vortex, mixing with gases and solids until the whole thing destabilized, exploding in a gloriously
demonstrative fuel-air-plasma discharge. This phenomenon took about 37 minutes to reach its point of critical instability, upon which the typhoon had changed temperature and composition too much to sustain. When it detonated, it caused a second surge into the sea waters that was felt up to 100 kilometers away in less than 3 minutes while splashing a monstrous flash-flood all over the burning, incandescent land masses up to 2 kilometers around the rotating tempest of water-logged trash. It also spread out a hail of carbonized or still blazing solid trash at up to seven kilometers away in a straight flight like so many millions of tracer bullets.

{ SQ } --- { Make it all burn! } --- { SQ }

In the 0 to 100 kilometer distance radius around the crater, everything burning wildly. Everything combustible was set alight immediately and directly by the explosion and energy discharges. From fuel to cars, to houses and industries, to the organic bodies of plants, animals and humans. Nothing was left but natural rock so dense and old that it could not burn or sublimate in the 9,000º Celsius heat that took three days after the explosions to cool down to seasonal norms.

In the 100 to 200 kilometer distance radius around the crater, everything made of glass, crystal, ceramics and most wood had pulverized, or at least shattered, from the hypersonic blast wave that traveled across the zone at more than mach 9 for a period of 8.98 seconds before dissipating. That same pulse of sound/vibration was responsible for pushing forth the scorching 6,500º Celsius front of dense air like an incandescent bulldozer blade five kilometers tall, instantaneously exploding to juicy mush all forms of life in its path while cremating it to free-floating ash in the same moment of impact.

In the 200 to 300 kilometer distance radius from the crater, there stood up no man-made structures anymore as they were all flattened, toppled over like trees battered by a storm. The outer edges of the blast wave that scoured the zone was greatly reduced in strength, down to mach 5, but still powerful enough to cause multiple super-cell tornadoes, dust storms, thunder-dust flashes, blow out the windows and doors of houses, and flatten anything not built of solid armored cement. The scorching 4,000º Celsius winds were still enough to qualify as a firestorm though, and plenty enough to light up then calcinate any construction materials, flesh or bone it encountered, despite leaving more inert material recognizable in its wake. Here and there, you could see occasional puddles of molten glass, patches of mud baked into instant ceramic that cracked and warped from the heat, and large stains or rivulets of metal that liquefied for a few minutes before solidifying anew, inlaid into the new apocalyptic landscape.

{ SQ } --- { Gaea's fury is felt } --- { SQ }

From up to 500 miles away, people could see the gigantic mushroom cloud raise from the ground, going so high in the upper atmosphere that it changed form to become a simple thin, elongated column of fire, ash, debris and fluorescent ionized gases that made it look like a vertical rainbow inside a dirty glass tube. People saw the rising cloud become a typhoon and collapse, far away, over the hills and tops of buildings that survived the devastating 11.7 Richter Scale earthquake that shook the entire eastern quarter of the American continent for a good 13.7 seconds, loosing strength until it was felt as barely a 5.6 RS in Los Angeles, or a menial 3.7 RS in Vancouver city. That telluric shock was felt in Europe at 1.68 RS, and along the western coast of the Africa continent too, causing bottom-wave carried tsunamis all the way to the depths of the Mediterranean Sea, flooding the coastal areas with several feet of frothing salt water for several minutes before receding.

The massive temblor caused hundreds of deep cracks in the south-east quadrant of the North American tectonic plate, spreading from the three points of explosion in a spiderweb pattern. The smallest cracks were one or two meters wide by about a hundred meters deep, but the biggest were genuine rents in the continental structure, almost 900 meters wide and near two kilometers deep, running for several hundred miles as they followed the breakage in the hard living rock of the
geological under-layers. Several natural rivers and lakes saw their beds suddenly give out, deepening by twice their normal depths when the bedrock beneath cracked or underwent a liquefaction phenomena that collapsed long thin stretches of soil normally hidden under the flowing waters.

In most cases, since these instant fault lines were all directly linked with the triangular crater and its three deeply penetrating explosion shafts, it only took mere minutes for the Atlantic ocean’s unbearable pressure to push up the Potomac River basin, up through the dregs of the blast wave and air pressure, to fill in the new canyons, thus causing thousands of sinkholes and widening the weak-walled cracks along the ways. What had been empty cracks, crags, faults and mini-valleys filled only with swirling scorching air choked with ash and silica dust took less than half a day to turn into a gigantic network of streams and rivers, ponds and lakes, marshes and swamps choked with toppled trees and the remains of man-made structures, with the occasional small but incredibly deep sunken well.

All of it was salt water.

All of it would be undrinkable oceanic water for centuries to come, until enough rain and snow had fallen to repel, dilute and re-equilibrate the hydraulic pressure needed to push back the encroaching sea tides and replace it with clear runoff water that plants, animals and humans could live from. The supreme irony of being stranded on piles of vitrified dead rocks, surrounded by innumerable bodies of water that nobody could drink or fertilize fields with would be lost on the handfuls of survivors, when the climate cleared enough for them to see the new landscape they were left with.

{ SQ } --- { The fragmentation of the east } --- { SQ }

By sundown, the entire geophysical structure and ecosystem of the eastern seaboard of the USA had been redrawn; they would need new maps and decades of accumulated data to understand just how deep and permanent the changes were.

The principal tectonic plate was damaged badly enough from the shocks and counter-shocks to have snapped. This caused the two seaboards to sag away from each other while a large weak spot started to form an enormous crevasse running north to south, from Toledo (Ohio) on the shores of Lake Erie, down to Columbus (Ohio), then Cincinnati (Ohio), Louisville (Kentucky), Nashville (Tennessee), then curving back east through Atlanta (Georgia) until it ended up at Savannah (Georgia) to create yet another opening for the Atlantic ocean to rush in. This telluric scar in the landscape was so irregular that it varied from 300 to 1,700 yards in width, and 400 to 3,000 yards in depth along its path.

This instant river was called The Grand Eastern Split by cartographers.

This massive curving swoop of a gash in the continent’s physical crust had just separated the old America in two distinct bodies; the western part that was still a single solid mass, and part of the main continent, while the eastern part was now a messy agglomeration of cracked valleys, jagged mountains and thousands of new streams, rivers and lakes filled of unusable saltwater for the foreseeable future.

This principal geophysical event was matched in intensity and violence by the subsequent break-away of the landmass that separated Washington DC from the seaway, a large fault line appearing from DC itself all the way north to Baltimore, cracking the tectonic plate and shoving off eastwards the central sector of Maryland. This fault line varied from 200 to 500 yards in width and 400 to 3,000 yards in depth as it was directly connected to the nuclear explosions and had received far more energy than the far away GES fault line.

This was followed by repercussive shocks in the foundation layers of the bedrock that weakened and
split off, causing a fault line from the cities of North East and Elkton in Maryland, from where the crack then progressed due east to a point midway between the towns of Bayview Manor and Delaware City in Delaware, averaging 800 to 1,200 yards in width. This tertiary event pushed away from the main US continental plate the enormous landmass that had sheltered the Potomac outlet and Chesapeake seaway from the worst Atlantic storms, a territory composed of Maryland's eastern half and 85% of Delaware.

The great sprawling metropolis covering the Washington-Baltimore-Arlington, DC-MD-VA-WV-PA Combined Statistical Area had held 10,000,000 permanent residents since 2019.

They were all dead now.

Roughly 1,000,000 tourists in the zone for Christmas with family or just sightseeing every year.

Plus an estimated 203,000 fanatical white christian males; carefully selected soldiers of the Grand Crusade Army, inquisitors, support priests and 'ennobled' or 'exalted' ecclesiastes presently favored by the newly elevated Papal Lord Amerikus. They had all moved in slowly at first, to help secure the Inauguration Day, as per the USA legal calendar, but then rushed in to protect the newly revealed White Christian Regency as it jumped the schedule to reveal itself a week before Christmas, a month before planned, in response to critically fatal legal challenges.

The challenges that Lucas had started and publicized on TV.

So it was that an estimated 11,250,000 people, give or take some sluts-of the pews, political attachés, or symbolic military aide-de-camps, that had all died in the blink of a disbelieving eye, with nary a warning to their impending doom.

The blast zone affected the distributed infrastructures in several states across the entire nation as electricity was cut off by the EMP burst, just as oil, gas, alcohol and charcoal stockpiles combusted in seconds, water and sewage pipes suffered pneumatic shocks that made them back-up catastrophically in spectacular geysers or else cooked the contents till it was naught but calcinated ash suspended in a plasma gas that melted what little remained of the pipes. The Internex on the eastern coast shut down due to the 1,1 second burst of highly ionic and magnetic radiation (EMP) that emanated at the explosion, but frantic global efforts managed to reboot the surviving nodes and servers remotely in the following hour, if they were situated far enough from the detonations to survive the physical part of the blasts.

Unfortunately for humanity, two dozen atmospheric recycling towers had been located in the zone affected as it was one of the most heavily polluted, and strategically important, in the USA. That, plus the fact that the US government had dreaded the possibility of a ICBN attack on itself since 1970. Thusly, they had built the two separate lines of 12 (inland & seaside) air & water filtrating towers to form a circular 'safety buffer' outside what military technicians stipulated would be the area affected by a Russian nuclear attack.

Their initial calculations had been correct, except for the fact that they had done the math based on regular atomic devices from the 1960-70 period. Small, tactically viable thermonuclear missiles came later in the late 80's, then the Russians invented the Tsar Ivan cargo plane deployed drop-bomb that had a 'reported' yield of 50 megatons. That was the biggest detonation used in the models until 2010. That is because in the year 2010, some unnamed individual working in a private lab on alternative fuels on a basic prototype for an electro-plasmatic reactor had accidentally invented Synthium. Nobody ever tested a Synthium blast bigger than 1 milliliter, at 1,100 meters deep inside a mine shaft. It had been declared a sufficient sample size to create the mathematical equations to predict
which quantity would create what kind of devastation, in how big a zone. Well, the scientists of 2010, if they were alive, could take comfort in knowing that their predictive mathematical models of a Synthium explosion had indeed been correct.

The models had gotten the wind pattern shifts almost to a 'T', the hydraulic movements in known bodies of water had followed suit, and the dust clouds had formed at the appointed moment. Everything had occurred as per the plans, except for the one thing they hadn't planned because it wasn't the warfare strategy being envisaged by anybody with a functioning brain.

The massive earthquakes, and the splintering on the tectonic plate were not in the models.

Why?

Because all models followed the conventional AERIAL attack pattern; not a planet-cracker strike.

Because somebody devoid of any humanity, driven by a deeply childish, religiously fanatical desire to say "It's mine and nobody else can have it! God said so!", had created a kill switch for the country without asking them before doing it. Not to mention that, as a religious dictator, this person had planned to have a Great Divine Revelation festivity during which he would tell the people to "Obey me as I give out God's Orders to you, or else die in fire like heretics!". Yes, it was part and parcel of the entire way of ruling and managing that the WCR had put in place.

The plan was simplistic but critically effective; they buried multiple Synthium weapons carrying 4 liters (1 gallon) of 'Blue Moon' variant per detonator, in a triangular pattern, at less than 25 kilometers of each other. They then set a catastrophic scenario of burying two levels of weapons, at 3,000 yards and 1,500 yards, plus another trio of weapons that would be elevated over the ground atop 100 yard long telescoping poles that would emerge from their underground bunkers when the time of detonation was nigh.

That made NINE weapons for a total of 36 liters (9 gallons) of reactive fluid.

Each liter of Synthium (Blue Moon) explodes equal to 50 megatons of TNT.

Each conflagrator had an estimated power of 200 megatons.

The nine weapons together yielded 1,800 megatons of RAW potential.

Because they were in such close proximity and timed to explode in the exact same millisecond, they actually catalyzed and amplified each other into an infernal cycle of mutual perpetuation for close to 9.27 seconds.

The result was that the zone suffered a three-tiered blast in the 2,100 megaton (compound) range, or roughly an increase in RAW yield of 12.5% on each weapon.

The mathematical models had never been made for that scenario.

Neither had the military and civil defense plans.

There were NO SURVIVORS anywhere inside 300 kilometers of the blast zone, and a fatality rate of near 66% in an extended zone in the 300 to 350 kilometers, 40% at 350 to 400 kilometers, and down beneath 10% in the 400 to 450 kilometers away from the actual events. Only the most heavily constructed, shielded, edifices with built-in autonomous life support would offer any kinds of hope in those zones, and even then, only if the openings were covered to keep out the glare and vibration/shock wave.
The final count at sundown, near 18:11pm (eastern time) that day was a compounded 30+ million dead across a dozen states. That number would reach above 50 million dead by the end of next day. That was 1/6 of the country's population at its peak.

The first group of deaths were immediate from the radiation burst, the hypersonic blast wave, the fire storms, the typhoon and subjacent tornadoes, non-critical injuries that went untreated, people being blinded or deafened by the explosion that went into shock and died afterwards from whatever happened then...

The second group was mostly people who died buried under debris, bled out from small but untreated injuries, and radiation exposure that had somehow not been as intense as others.

It would only get worse when the earth shook and cracked, the salt water rushing in then turning to toxic boiling haze on contact that would either parboil alive or poison everything it touched.

The worse part of it was this;

These were just the fatalities from the bombs going off. There were still a Religious War and Youth Rebellion against the tyrannical government going on. The country had already lost tens of millions of people in the last 20-odd hours, and was still going down deeper into a hole it couldn't climb out of without external help.

Then, in the following days, weeks and months, despair & depression borne suicides, disease, untreated injuries, savage criminality and other factors would kill off millions more.

{ SQ } --- { Humanity loses ground } --- { SQ }

One of the most catastrophic consequences of these geophysical temblors was the splitting of several pieces of land from each other, the creation of deep crevasses when the earth's under-layers liquefied causing collapses, sinkholes and long cracks all over the eastern quarter of the country.

The most violently different and climatically catastrophic change was the Grand Eastern Split that ran north to south, as described previously. The most dangerous problem of the Split was that it now connected the Lake Erie directly to the Atlantic through a circuitous route, several thousand miles long, that was riddled with lateral cracks formed in the same cataclysmic event. This meant that the water level and pressure in Lake Erie suddenly dropped as the winter-chilled, ice-covered soft water sought to follow the lowest point of the newly redone geography. The same was true for the hundreds of cracks along the Grand Eastern Split as they connected to existing rivers and lakes, or directly to the Atlantic ocean via shorter routes than the GES.

This was catastrophic for the ecosystems in the direct zone; it meant that in the coming decades nature would have barely 20% of the fresh ground water that it had before to sustain new plants or animals. For humans, this was worse as they needed farming and ranching to eat, while also needing the soft water to cook, wash, heal, and use in industrial process.

In a far wider geographic context, it was a hecatomb for the entire Saint-Lawrence River as it had already suffered declining water levels for four decades at this point due to over-consumption by cities all around the five Great Lakes that were its source. The SL Seaway traffic would also be badly impacted as cargo boats needed a steady reliable depth to navigate several of the shallower points between the Five Great Lakes of North America and their connecting rivers. This sudden loss of water level and flow strength would dry out many thousand square miles of lateral shorelines, cause wet towns to suddenly have dry harbors in the coming summer, and force a redesign of all commercial shipping on the Lakes towards smaller, lighter ships, thus creating a lot of jammed traffic all around.
The most visible and critical proof of the dangerous situation was that the Niagara Falls located between Ontario and New York State were suddenly only half as strong as they had been, even with the wintry climate having made much of the falling water curtain into towering icicles, the same way it did every year. Except that the temperature was warming up at great speeds, and the icicles began to melt, falling down in great crackling shards of clear white ice as if it were spring again. The Niagara power plant managers called their superiors in Toronto, to alert them of the situation, barely seven hours after the atomic blasts had occurred, but nobody had made the logical link between events yet.

The aquatic hecatomb and matching carbonized wasteland on the ground meant that for decades to come, the only reliable methods of transport in the 600 kilometer wide 'strike' area would be aircraft and trains, once the railroads were repaired by the military's efforts at reclaiming the sovereign land before somebody else. Since the country wanted to rebuild itself, even with radically altered borders, it needed the trains to bring in materials, tools and people since the vast majority of the new cracks that filled with water were just too small to pass anything bigger than a leisure boat. In fact, some crevasses in the bedrock were hundreds of yards deep, filled to the brim with cold salty ocean water, but barely wide enough for a man to row a kayak along its path without hitting the side with his oar.

This entire destabilization of the continental underpinnings with widespread burning-out of ground and arable land, followed in mere days by monsoon strength rainfalls, caused severe flash floods that washed-out the remaining topsoil into the new salt water crags. This widespread erosion and loss of cultivation, ranching and logging territory would force the USA to adopt far more stringent environmental protections, building codes and land-use zoning laws that were no longer negotiable (payable to corrupt elected officials) as before the explosions.

It would take concerted, centralized willpower, money, and leadership sustained for centuries to reclaim and rebuild the destroyed parts of America in these new raw, barren and unforgiving places.

There was no way that this would end well anymore.

Mission interrupted, yet again

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:20pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:20pm (noon)
Daleminton Hotel, suite #204
Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

All the people assembled in the dining and kitchen areas of the suite were watching the wall mounted Internex screen with deadened eyes, their pallid faces and clammy skins more fitting for cadavers than living humans. The few who had been getting out into the corridor were called back in urgently, then pointed silently at the television, where a red emergency banner had appeared at the bottom of the image frame, writing plainly what had happened 8 minutes ago.

Washington DC had just been destroyed by atomic fire, and the repercussion were being felt in the air, water and ground of the entire planet. Just as the senior agent for CSIS was about to ask a question of his colleague from the ministry of defense, a loud noise emanated from the foundations of the building, spreading upwards throughout the structure, shaking furniture and decorative items alike.
An earthquake.

The violent destruction of the American capital had been so horrendously catastrophic that the entire northern tectonic plate, known as the 'Canadian Shield', was affected badly enough to inflict a 3.7 Richter scale temblor to the western quarter of Canada. The countryside nearer the blast was shaken far worse and suffered immense collateral damages that stunned the people, unused to such phenomenon as they were all located in geologically stable areas.

Lucas Wolenczak was looking at the screen in disbelief, gazing at the image of the massive artificial typhoon that had risen where DC once stood as if he were hallucinating. The gigantic column of gases, boiling water and incandescent debris was illuminated from within by arcing discharges of plasma like an old lava lamp or a novelty Tesla coil luminary. The camera was able, despite being located hundreds of kilometers away, to capture the fountain effect of the hailstorm of burning debris and raining ashes, making it look like some eerie gothic spectacle from a Victorian era theater play. You only needed the dancing dead and a pipe organ made of bones to complete the funeste tableau.

After about five minutes more, cellphones began to ring, the Canadians being called by their agencies to report and receive new orders in regards to the emerging situation. It was called a national civil security crisis, despite happening inside the neighbor's borders. Nobody asked why. The answer was bloody evident, as shown on TV without the need for comments from any news anchor, if there were still one on the job at this point of US history.

{ SQ } --- { This can't be happening, can it? } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:25pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:25pm (noon)

Forgetting all the people in the room, their identities and the significance of their jobs, the stunned teenager stood up to walk woodenly towards the main fridge, leaning on his cane as he ambled around unsteadily. Taking out the carton of doughnuts he had ordered in yesterday, he passed it to – somebody – then handed over the carton of mixed muffins, juice & milk bottles, cream jug, and the last two croissants in the carton that had been present when he took the suite...

When again had he arrived? How many days?

It wasn't important; not anymore.

Pointing one junior CSIS agent at the upper cupboards, he told him: "Get the thermal carafes down and brew some coffee for the group. The machine has a setting for 12 cup bottles. Things are gonna get dicey and we'll need all the fuel we can get, before were carried away by events. It's better not to have a lineup in front of the dispenser, if we can avoid it. Being deprived of coffee isn't something we should try to live with, right now." Turning to a second CSIS agent, he old the man: "Go to the empty suites next door, on either side; stoke ablaze the wood stoves, set out the dry foodstuffs on the dining table, and light up the TV on CNN or any American channel that still works. The NCIS and DXS teams can crash in one for the time being, you CSIS and RCMP guys get the other one."

Sitting back at his chair by the principal oven, the boy glared at everybody in sight. "What? Do you all really think that this is my first life-threatening situation? I was hospitalized in fear for my life four different times in 16 years. I know how to bunker down like the best of you. Now, stop using your hands for ass-warmers and move! The hotel's about to sound their storm-shutter alarms, forcing people either in or out, so make up your minds. And call your teams outside to tell them what happened, so they can understand why everybody's acting like a headless chickens all-a-sudden."

Jack Dalton was still stuck on the twin-like resemblance between Angus and Lucas that had never
been truly evident when speaking through a vidphone. Then, viewing the explosion in Washington DC had pretty much fried every last circuit in his brain, so getting bossed around by a kid, even if his ideas were good, wasn't the thing he wanted to hear right now. Rolling his shoulders and setting his face in a grim pose, he walked a single pace towards the teenager when the boy locked eyes with him, the unearthly blueness of the pupils sending a shiver of dread down his back. Like any professional soldier, Jack had been taught that if anything scared him that much, it needed to be immediately cowed into submission then paid-off or destroyed so it didn't threaten his mission anymore. The USMC worked that way, the Delta Forces had drilled that into him without pause, and the decade he spent undercover for the CIA reinforced this at all pre-ops briefings.

Presently, Jack Dalton was scared senseless by a lot of things.

By the racist bigotry in America that never seemed to die, no matter what they did.

By the fanatic religious cults that cropped up every year, always more murderous than the last.

By the spontaneous civil war tearing apart his homeland, leaving precious little behind.

By the nuclear blast that tore apart all hopes of fixing their injured, dying society in his lifetime.

By the continents cracking asunder, changing the environment for ever without hope of repairs.

And finally, by this rich, super-genial, strange and amoral child, who had so much power over them all that it seemed the laws for ordinary people didn't apply to him any longer.

With all his US Marines warfare training, all his martial arts, the Delta Forces CQC specialization, the CIA's tradecraft for espionage & sabotage, all compounding to 32 years of armed/spying services to the nation, and he was now without any idea how to move forward. The enormity of everything he saw and heard literally crippled him, until the boy had moved around and spoken. That rebooted his mind, but not the right way.

He couldn't affect anything else in his mission, career or life, but this he could change, and with relative ease, too. Like all big, powerful, men passed the age of 30 who knew how to fight with guns, knives or their hands, the default fall-back psychology was to ignore what he couldn't change, instead bullying the weakest persons in sight until – somebody – found a way to repair the damages, or he, the big man, had evacuated enough stress from his mind to think straight again.

In his normal everyday life, Jack Dalton wasn't a bully, not like many he knew. He never picked on kids, didn't stalk women, and always kept a respectful distance between himself and the geeks' latest creations so he didn't cause a malfunction or get maimed accidentally. In his missions, he gladly served as Mack's sounding board, even supporting him during his weirder, insomnia-driven, periods of cogitation when the younger male made it look like the universe was inverted and it was actually working better like that.

Today wasn't a normal day.

Today wasn't a regular mission.

Today, Jack's stress buffer couldn't cope, nor purge fast enough to avoid using the old inbred, culturally programmed default psychology. The kid had started all this by being weird, indocile, rebellious and out of hand. To his feverish short-circuited mind, the solution was simplistic in the extreme: make the kid a child again. Make the boy 'ordinary'. Make him behave like a 16 year old 'should' in usual, everyday America, then curb harshly and terminally that damnable autonomy and rebelliousness of his.
Jack Dalton could possibly have held back at the last second.

It's possible he would have recoiled, never laying a hand on Lucas Wolenczak at all.

He wasn't usually a bully or an ageist bigot, and he despised child beaters.

As far as Riley had known him, he had never hit her while he was dating her mother Diane, nor any child he had a relation with.

He had once threatened Angus with building a woodshed in his partner's backyard, so he could drag him into it to tan his hide with a belt if the younger man was ever so reckless as to almost kill himself with a crazy-assed plan - again. That was 2 years ago, Mac had been 25 at the time. As an adult, and a professional soldier at that, Angus could not be described as a child, nor a victim of anybody, in such a clearly untrue way. Not in his relationship with Jack at any rate. The only person in his entourage to have ever willingly victimized Angus was his father, James MacGyver, and that was by absence, abandonment, faking his death for 15 years, and manipulating his son from the shadows; never by hitting him or handing him over to a violent tutor of some sort.

All these factoids and maudlin thoughts were of no use in the situation.

In front of desperate friends who tried to move to restrain him, in front of witnesses who shouted at him to stop, Jack became like a bloodhound in a hunt. He was myopically focused on the child that every instinct inside his being told him caused all this mess, and was the biggest threat to take out in the room, to keep the mess from getting worse.

He stepped forward one whole pace, a whole yard, with anger, violence and male dominance written plainly on his face for all to see.

Then his eyesight was gone for a fraction of a second, filled by a flash of blue light so harsh it hurt his eyes too bad to keep them open anymore. Reflexively closing his eyes and raising both hands to shield his face from the injurious glare, his defensive instincts also kicked in, overriding his basal need for dominance and control over what he had perceived as the cause of the disaster. Before his sight was even returned, he felt wrap around his upper body two strong arms ending in long, slender fingers that he knew so well as to recognize them by feel. He and Mac had done first aid and rescue maneuvers on each other so many times in the last five years, since their EOD patrol days, that both could recognize their partner's hands and touch in the worse situations.

FEAR.

That was the message from his buddy's shaking, demanding side-hug wrapped around his torso, and the hard fists, tightly clenched in his button-down shirt, as he dragged Jack out of suite #204 and into the other one next door, the #202.

Something had just happened to make Jack blind, and it scared the bejeezus out of Mac and the rest of their team. He could hear Riley crying despite all her efforts not to give in, and Bozer was trying to console her without patronizing or silencing her. This was bad, since the young woman hadn't cried in front of him since she was 11 years old, after a bad fight between Diane and a drunken Elwood had turned violent.

"The fuck happened in there?" Kensi Blye asked/ordered in her Marines-in-charge tone that even her partners in L.A knew to heed, given how seldom she used it.

"Beam weapon hidden inside the cane pommel." was Sebastian Lund's concise and exact answer,
making everything both clear and nebulous at the same time for everybody in the new suite.

"Excuse me, agent Lund, for asking you to repeat that, but could you..." Jack blinked his eyes repeatedly, hoping somehow that the movement in the eyelid muscles would have some sort of positive effect. The alternative was permanent glare-blindness, just as if he had been looking into the focal lens of a laser array back at the Phoenix laboratory. "I don't want to be a bother, but if you could spell that out at length? And slower too, for those of us without anything higher than a technical college degree? I'd be much obliged." the 50 year old asked lightly, trying to make fun of the situation to avoid a breakdown of his own.

Sighing deeply in weariness, Sebastian took his glasses off to rub the bridge of his nose, as he sat at the foot of the dining table. The rest of the two field teams spread around the table, with MacGyver squatting besides Jack to maintain his side-hug around the older man, even if looser, less panicked, and less needy at this point. Kensi sat on a chair with Marty standing behind her, his arms wrapped loosely around her neck as he laid his chin atop her head. Tammy sat by Sebastian, patting his arm in silent support as she looked him over for signs of injury or impending trouble, a habit she had developed last year after he began field work by her side. Wilt guided Riley to sit on Jack's left side so she could hold his hand, while taking the chair on her left at the head of the table with the wood stove at his back.

Folding the arms of his glasses, Sebastian opted to keep them in his hands for the moment. After seeing the nuclear explosion on TV, he wasn't certain he wanted to see anything else today. In fact, going to bed and closing his eyes for ten to fourteen hours sounded just like the best medicine he could think of in the present catastrophe.

"Okay, it's like this" spoke the forensics tech in tired, weary words. "Doctor Wolenczak has a new cane; we all saw that in the vidphone call from Sunday. Well, besides a retractable blade in the lower end, he also put an emitter for a pulse weapon inside the pommel of his cane. By the information I have from classified sources working at the design and manufacturing of these things, the flash of bluish light that you described is the lowest setting available, at 1% power. It's only used when testing the weapon's strength, frequency, modulation and coloration before handing out to soldiers. It's also used as a 'warning shot' in case you want to deter an incoming threat without causing fatality."

"So, the kid flashed Dalton with a laser pointer?" asked Deeks, not sure he was pleased with the explanation. It had to be worse than that. It certainly sounded worse.

"No, oh Hell no!" Lund responded, upset and fearful at the same time. "That's not a keychain gimmick for teachers to point at a blackboard! That's a genuine pulse pistol he's managed to miniaturize into his cane's handle, not a damned toy! Pay attention when I say things! Dammit all! Are you people really in that much of a hurry to get yourselves killed? This boy doesn't kid around! He doesn't have toys in his bags! Remember; he tried to kill somebody for the first time at age 4! Kidding around with lasers and pulse emitters isn't a 'thing' with him! When he aims at you, he means to kill or maim, not tickle you!"

Whelming his courage, Angus asked in whispered words; "Okay. He flashed Jack with a pulse. Not a laser, a pulse. That's important for us. Lasers are thin, medium powered but very long range and extremely accurate on the targeting ring down-range. Pulses are thick at the muzzle, very powerful but with a short, limited range before they lose cohesion. They can be fired in strafing runs or area shapes like cones and fans, unlike a laser that's always a thin continuous line. That means, Jack has low-yield retinal overload, as if he looked into the flash module of a professional camera when it triggered. At only 1% power, the pulse should blind him for only 10 to 30 minutes, tops. A laser of any strength would have scored the inside of the eye, inflicting permanent damage on the light
receptors, but a pulse doesn't work like that. He'll be okay, then. Given time, he'll recover."

Patting Jack on the shoulder in sympathy, Angus stood up and shook his long legs to return some feeling to them. After a sigh of relief, he placed a hand on his older friend's head, telling him kindly "Keep your eyes firmly closed until I tell you. I'm gonna find you a washcloth in the bathroom to make a cold compress for your eyes, to cool them down and help keep out the ambient light."

As the blond male walked away, Tammy Gregorio called after him "We'll keep the artificial lights shut until he's okay. The flames in the wood stoves are good enough for the rest of us to move by. Speaking of which, wasn't there supposed to be food in here? I'm getting in the fridge, anybody wanna help get the stuff out for the evening? I got this gut feeling we're here for a while now."

"You want to eat after what just happened?" queried a tearful Riley, askance at the concept. The young woman had just come a hair's width from losing her surrogate dad, she wasn't in a good mood, not that there had been anything good in the last 4 days.

Jack himself inserted himself in the conversation, again with a chipper tone; "Finger food! Or doughnuts, please. I'm gonna have to occupy my hands for a while, and I just don't do paperclips like Mac. I'm Texan; from where I grew up, we eat when we're stressed out."

"I hear ya" Marty said, sympathizing with the older man. "I'm the same way. If we were at home, I'd be cooking for ya'll right about now." Giving his fiancée a loving squeeze around the neck, he turned to Gregorio, offering to help her ferry foodstuffs to the table since he was already standing and antsy for action anyways.

They were halfway done with spreading out the reserves of finger-food from the fridge and pantry, with one 12-cup carafe of coffee done and the second being brewed, when Angus came back from the bathroom, walking slowly and unsteadily, staying near walls and furniture so he could support himself if he became unstable. He took one of Jack's hands to guide the cold compress in place so he could hold it himself then sat on the man's right side, letting out a sickly sigh as he finally stopped moving.

With pursed lips and a pinched expression visible around the compress, Jack asked firmly "Angus? Did you get sick in the toilet? You were there a long time, and you were walking weird when you came back. The carpets here are an inch thick, but I'm pretty damned sure that's not your usual tread I was hearing. And you smell of luxury mouthwash, like after a visit at the dentist, not the brands you buy when you're on an infiltration op. The hotel soap's odor is stuck on the cuffs of your shirt, you were careless when you washed your hands after vomiting, but before wetting the towel for me. Did I miss anything?"

Everybody looked at Jack with round eyes, the sudden silence stretching weirdly until the man shrugged it off gamely. "What? You people thought that being blind was new to me? Pfft! I was made blind with a chemical for a month during the second year of Delta Force training, as preparation for surviving crippling battle injuries or contamination from the drug labs we would be raiding in south-America. We were all forced to learn how to read Braille print, with extra credits for those who could actually write it in reply. We were set to live inside our own barracks, with a specialist tutor, for 30 days straight to acclimatize to working, fighting and patching ourselves up when blind, or with functioning eyes but in 0% lighting situations."

As the team members were all silent, he added with a bratty grin "And I always had a good ear, despite rumors otherwise. It's just that hearing things, understanding them, and then actually doing what you're told like a good little boy are three different things, you know..."

Groans of disbelief rewarded his performance as he extended his free hand to pat Mac's thigh, giving
his buddy a good strong squeeze to reassure him, and himself, that everything would be okay. Still
though, the blue-eyed wunderkind had thought he'd be sick all alone and not tell anybody, especially
his favorite brotherly Jack? Nahn-ahn, that wan'nt gonna happen!

"Angus, dearie," asked Jack in fake-sweet tones as if he were speaking to his girlfriend, much to the
amusement of everybody. "You still haven't told me how you feel, and if you need anything. Now
come on soldier, man up and tell me so I can help you." he finished in his regular strong voice.

Folding his arms atop the table, Angus put down his forehead on the improvised pillow, sighing a
depth, soul-weary exhale. "We almost lost you, Jack. I don't know by what miracle Doctor
Wolenczak didn't use a lethal setting when he shot you, but the truth is... He had you, Jack... He had
you, right in the face, and if it had been any other type of weapon... Bullet don't have stun settings or
disappear after leaving the gun barrel. By all rights, you should be dead, Jack, not cracking jokes
about stress-eating your way to a coronary."

Jack Dalton did not need his eyes to see clearly just how shaken his entire little family was, and it
was all his fault. He knew full well that his brain had disjuncted for a second, making him blame
everything wrong or hurtful in the universe on the teenager sitting in front of him. The kid was their
mission, but he wasn't cooperating with anybody from the USA anymore, not after having his head
illegally put on a wanted poster like in the Old West era. Even the Canadians were having a hard
time despite their patience and friendliness. Now, Andrea Dre herself was barely making any
headway with him. Then the nuke exploded in DC, and Jack's mind melted down with it.

He really was lucky the young man hadn't blown up is head like a water balloon.

Holding the cold compress across his eyes with his left hand, the Delta Forces veteran passed his
right hand up and down his younger friend's back, trying to help Mac recover from his fright. At that
moment, Jack realized that if Wolenczak had been the least little bit more bloodthirsty, Angus would
have gotten to him only fast enough to keep his decapitated corpse from hitting the floor. That image
almost made him sick; the phantom of a devastated MacGyver stepping in to stop Jack's ill-thought
move, only to give one last hug to a mutilated cadaver that didn't even have a face to be identified
anymore.

Making a stentorian effort to hold his bile in, the older male gave his friend a loving squeeze on the
nape of his neck, leaving his hand in place as a way to connect with him emotionally, and maybe
steady his own disoriented mind as well. Their little family had come close to the irrevocable because
he'd acted stupidly, and none of them could afford a mistake like that again. Not in this job, and
certainly not on this mission. The little genius across the table wouldn't allow them a second chance,
not after what he already let pass, whatever his reasons had been. The teenager's patience with
American violence, bigotry and domination over his life had run out a week ago; the teams were
running on the hope he still had some to lend, but that mortgage would have a price. A price that
Jack had no doubt foolishly pushed outside of their capacity to pay, unless it was their souls they
paid with. That would never happen, because he'd go deep dark on the kid before that. But, what
retaliation measures had the boy already placed in prevision of exactly that kind of situation? Would
his family survive?

Jack smelled the fresh coffee that was being poured, the unmistakable aroma of high class beans
hitting his nostrils in a refreshing way that helped to take his mind off its circular path to nowhere.
"I'll have me some of that there Java juice. And anything solid that I can eat with one hand, when I'm
not drinking. Unless Mac wants to feed me like a pasha reclining on a couch, like the Romans did.
That'd be fun, but the NCIS team would probably ask questions about, you know, us..."

Tammy smirked widely as she poured herself a cup, saying at the same time "Oh, don't worry! After
sharing a plane and a deployment dorm with you guys over 24 hours, were all waaayyy past questions anymore. In fact, I don't think we'd want the answers anyhow."

Riley blinked uncertainly, trying to dry her eyes as Wilt took a pair of coffee cups that he fixed to the liking of his friends, then setting them near Jack and Angus. She still wasn't sure it was time for jokes, but everybody else seemed to be moving along, so she let it go. As Wilt prepared coffees for her and himself, Riley's attention turned towards Sebastian Lund, who still held his glasses between long, immobile fingers, deep in thought about what had just happened to their homeland.

"Agent Lund? Are you alright? You seem lost inside your own thoughts." the young female hacker asked softly, he voice still unsteady from the emotional shock she had experienced.

Putting on his glasses, the forensics tech gave the woman who had pulled him from his depressive mindset a kind smile. "I was trying to mentally compute something, and the results aren't good. I need to see the world map, if neither of you mind."

Kensi replied with a vague gesture with her coffee cup, as she bit into a plain butter croissant. Marty, still standing behind her was similarly disposed, nodding silently his assent. Tammy bit her muffin hard enough to hold it in her mouth as she was pouring cream into her coffee, so she had a free hand to pull the wired tablet off it's dock, pushing it to Sebastian so he could access the net. The entire DXS team made gestures of agreement too, although they were distracted at the time.

Lips pursed and eyes squinted in disapproval at what he saw, Lund grabbed the cup of coffee somebody had put in front of him, fixed just as he liked thus telling him it was Gregorio's doing. Sipping the warm liquid with an appreciative sigh, he ignored the offer of more solid food as he gazed into the blurry depths of the Internex Mappe Mundia. He frowned more, as his research told him things he really didn't want to see.

"We have a problem that will affect the entire continent for millions of years to come." Sebastian told the teammates in a miserable tone of voice that conveyed the gravity fully. "The earthquake we first felt was just the first of hundreds to come. Look at this." he swiped the tablet, sending the image to the wall-mounted monitor, automatically reducing the live newsfeed to mortise position in the left side column. "This is North America before the blast, and besides it is what we now have. Can anyone tell me what that means?" he asked like a geography teacher speaking to his class.

Wilt Bozer squeaked like a mouse with its tail in a trap as he saw the images side-by-side. "What in the ever-loving Heaven's pearly white gates is that? Is that our country? Can it be? Mac! Can a nuke do that? I can understand a crater, but this? What the fuck did they use over there?"

Angus raised his head to look at the image, already knowing what he would see. The successive small temblors that had been coming in from the east were too subtle for the others to feel, but his brain had been chemically and electrically unbalanced since the last time Murdoch had poisoned him. He felt most of them pass in the last 15 minutes, and that was what made him seasick. Seeing Jack get blasted in the face hadn't helped his mood, but wasn't the real reason he had vomited his breakfast, not that he planned on telling the team as there was an absolute nothing any of them could do to heal him. The other three would just angst and worry about him for no good results, and they needed to concentrate on reality as much as they could, at this point.

Swallowing a bit to wet his throat, the young man said "What you're seeing Bozer is the result of multiple Synthium warheads exploding in close proximity, at multiple depths in the ground, on a scheduled pattern from the deepest up to the surface. The effect wanted is the same as open-pit mining for rock to grind into cement powder. The deep blasts create voids that strain the substructure while creating a craterized pattern for the debris to fall into like bowls. Then, the middle and upper blasts crack and liberate the rock from the cliff face, making it fall into the trenches just blown out,
instead of spreading chaotically all over the mining pit's work floor. It's not the only blasting technique, and not the best either, but it's one of the oldest methods in use. Professional miners actually prefer to synchronize multiple small charges to detonate all at once, in an effort to crack the stone while limiting the probability of shrapnel flying off the exploding work-face. In this case, they used the other method because it's historically proven to cause a lot of flying debris, a huge cloud of dust suspended in the air for a long time, and massive structural damages to the under-layers of the work pit."

Sebastian Lund added, quite morbidly; "And their calculations worked. They must have had a geophysicist in their team, because this just reeks of an attempted synthetic geodesic fault designed to bring about a solicited pyroclastic event."


Rolling his eyes at them, the New Orleans native explained in detail; "It seems that somebody wanted to not only crack the tectonic plate to send Washington DC into the ocean the same way Atlantis supposedly ended, they also tried to finish that by having their nukes dig down enough to breach the magma mantle to cause the emergence of a lava flow. They wanted to ignite a super-volcano to incinerate anybody trying to take over DC, and mark the city's grave like Mount Vesuvius did to Pompeii in Roman antiquity. Whoever had that idea was both an unstable suicidal bastard, and an egomaniac of unmitigated proportions."

Riley griped nastily as she grabbed her coffee cup with both hands: "Three guesses whose decision that was, and the first two don't count."

{ SQ } --- { Harsh realities of survival } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:25pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:25pm (noon)

Lucas marched angrily to his office, slamming the doors shut and locked behind him, then sat imperiously in the padded wheeled chair. He put on the meta-glasses, ordering the neural interface to its fullest activation so he could process in seconds what would normally take hours by mundane methods of paper, pens and a tabletop calculator. These bastards thought they could attack him and threaten his welfare, his health and his very life AGAIN after everything he had endured! How in Everburning Hell's bloody blue blazes did they hope to get away with this? Because, you know, there would be retaliations, many, many, many brutally cruel retaliations. With an 'S' pluralized, cuz there'd be so many all at once.

Concentrating his well justified rage at the data streams passing in front of his eyes, he sent a series of aggressive, commanding emails and SMS to several dozen managers and supervisors in his multiple companies, especially the heavy manufacturing divisions in Sault-Sainte-Marie, Sarnia, Detroit and the central control hub in Buffalo. He took the time, mere seconds in truth, to elaborate a set of detailed plans for taking his 'weak' or isolated facilities to a war stance so that they wouldn't be robbed or hijacked from his holdings by local thugs that imagined themselves warlords in the same vein as ISIS, the Taliban, or Somali pirate bosses.

The teenager sent to all his remote facilities a series of designs that would allow them to build manufacturing modules similar to the one he had in the Daleminton, but without any neural circuitry or crystals in the machine. These new generation, high performance 3D printer/router/mill systems would allow the employees to download blueprints from the mother node in Buffalo then mill them to specs to assemble into either man-portable weapons or mounted automated defenses. In both cases, he needed to arm and bolster his employees and land holdings lest he see them overrun by riffraff in the coming days.
The face of Shay Mosley came to mind, along with many others.

Making a face as if he had just sucked on a raw lemon slice, the adolescent directed his potent mind to the deeper, secret registers of the Wise Heritage & Trust manor in Buffalo, so he could access the central archival & inventory that his great-grand-father had left behind when he so conveniently disappeared in the Early 1970's. Accessing the sheltered, heavily ciphered part of the archives was no longer as painstaking as it used to be four years ago when he first found it. Having both a mathematical system that matched the source code and a functional neural interface to adequately synthesize the frequencies in the circuit boards made the transit from normal CPU's to the ancient servers far less onerous than anyone else would suffer if they tried.

Once inside the virtual part of his heritage, the teenager looked immediately for three things that would tip the balance of power in his favor;

1- The keys and codes to open the nitrogen-sterilized dry-storage garages & vaults hidden under each facility that the Wise Conglomerate had built since 1934 onwards, once F.H.Wise had taken control of the familial businesses. These massive secret and armored garages supposedly held vehicles and weapons from the pre- World War II era that the Canadian, American or Allied governments had chosen to not purchase, or had ordered then canceled when the war was won. In either case, every manor, industry, manufacture and warehouse in his holdings was supposed to sit atop a sizable cache of armaments that, even if antiquated, would still work well enough to push back terrorists and organized crime. Against a national army or the UEO, time only could tell.

2- The fully detailed structural blueprints & defensive plans for each of the facilities owned under the Wise banner. His ancestors had fled racist and religious persecution in Europe after being ransacked, beaten and kicked out of their homes violently by the country's military, so they had learned to build bunkerized storage, people shelters and hidden reinforced workshops to serve as armories or infirmaries. Their secrets were buried deep in the cement foundations under the official basement levels, or stuffed inside of extra thick brick walls that seemed built for eternity but were in fact two walls with hollow passages and chambers between them. These armored shelters would become the dormitories, dining halls, infirmaries and shooting galleries from which his employees would resist assault from the outside world, just as his ancestors had foreseen. Once he had the plans, he would reformat them with color codes then send those edited versions to the managers of each compound to begin allocating the extra space according to the lists he appended to the designs.

3- Chemical weapons recipes. Franklin Henry Wise had been a world celebrated surgeon, apothecary, homeopath, naturopath and eugenicist. Presently, in 2020, Lucas could confirm easily that three of these professional certifications had absolutely no value whatsoever. Homeopathy & naturopathy were the same foul quackery that had no value, despite that certain universities in Canada and the USA did offer certification and the title 'doctor' upon completion. It was still useless magical thinking based on pushing pills made of baked flour, sugar, dye and garden plant extracts with almost no medicinal effects possible, given how the concentration of ingredients was so diluted. Eugenics was the medical science concerned with creating 'perfect' or 'penultimate' organic entities, usually for the purpose of having the best soldiers or docile slave laborers. Suffice it to say that F.H.Wise had a lot of sympathies with the Nazi cause, and many SS officers were close friends of his. Sick, twisted, blood-betraying bastard of a race-traitor that he was. However, the profession of apothecary was modernized, in quite an easy transition, to become chemists, then more recently pharmacists. On that, great-grand-father had been rather gifted when it came to understanding atoms, molecules, DNA and the interactions of synthetic compounds with the living biology of plants, animals or humans. His qualifications as a surgeon had been amongst the best of his epoch, and would still be considered quite excellent this day. This meant that with his political and philosophical leanings, the treasonous criminal had worked on several variations of known chemical weapons, both to increase the lethality of the existing formulae as well as finding antidotes & preemptive
defenses. Given his masterful qualifications and astute mind, Wise's work-product would still be
today an award-winning innovation that few could match, or find protections against. There was a
compilation of all these exhaustive works in the archive, but Lucas now needed to parse through
them so he could choose the useful ones, then send out only the edited 'sanitized' versions to his
facilities where they would be manufactured and loaded into the defensive weaponry.

The young man was done with jobs number 1 and 2 when an alarm sounded both virtually and
physically to bring his awareness to focus on the imminent threat the automated surveillance apps
had identified. It took barely two seconds for the boy to see, understand and commit an emergency
exit from Cyberspace, then a whole minute to reorient himself enough to sit still as he planned the
response to the disaster.

The Great Eastern Split was going to destroy Lake Erie by poisoning it with salted sea water, then all
the Saint-Laurent river hydrological basin beyond Erie. As far as all the data, people, vehicles,
buildings and weapons he could know and understand, Lucas could only come up with a single
conclusion, and it would not be pretty or without cost. A cost to himself and everybody else, no
matter what came next. He rose from his chair, gripping his armament-cane tightly, and marched out
into known adversity yet again.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:25pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:25pm (noon)

The senior CSIS agent in charge (name/rank classified) of overseeing the survival and welfare of the
teenaged genius Lucas Wolenczak was almost at the point of tearing out his receding hairline. Of all
the people he had expected to lose their mind and attack the kid, a Delta Forces veteran with a
decade of CIA plus four years of DXS under his belt wasn't it! What the fucking Hells had taken
over Dalton's brain to try jumping on the brat like that?

A wide blue flash.

That was all him, his boys and the pair of Canadian marines had seen before MacGyver had
managed to manhandle his defective partner out of the suite altogether. And lucky for them that he
did. Wolenczak looked like he wanted to go to war over this, and wouldn't back down from it any
time soon. At least, the worse he did was grab his tea set and storm into his damned lair with the
doors closed tightly behind him.

For now.

Like any rabid beast, hunger and an innate instinct to depredate the environment would have the boy
stalking the rooms of the suite soon enough. They had better be prepared with apologies and gifts for
when that happened or there would be bloodshed, he could predict it. What in Tarnation would they
be obliged to give the kid to keep him from spreading poisons and malfeasance around? He took out
his smartphone, dialing the number for the HQ of CSIS that nobody knew existed, not the public
front-piece that was tagged with a big logo in Ottawa. What was the point of being a 'secret service'
if everybody, their dog and the mutt's fleas, could find you to plant mikes and bombs in the walls?

After three tones had sounded in the line, he entered an alphanumeric pass-code followed by a verbal
pass-phrase singular to his person, which was done simultaneously to the phone's camera filming his
visage for facial recognition apps to confirm his identity and security clearance. Once he was inside
the first layer of the system, he sent a SMS to his superior, the British Columbia regional director,
and waited for the man to hijack his line to update him on the situation in the Daleminton. Their
principal had just gotten his hackles up, and that wasn't gonna be good for a while.

"Special Supervisory Agent. What is your situation?" came the sudden, unheralded voice from the
phone's speaker. It was indistinguishable since it was actually an electronically constructed voice to avoid any listener from recording the voice print to try to access their systems, vehicles or buildings with such a high level ID. While it was not identifiable to a specific person, the tonalities and emotional accentuation's were still present, and the speaker was clearly not happy to be called.

Taking a deep breath, the SSA explained succinctly: "We were watching the TV when the explosion happened." No need to say which explosion, everybody knew. "Then doctor Wolenczak began issuing orders to get out the food and bunker down for a long day of damage control. At that point, DXS agent Dalton had some sort of episode that had him move aggressively towards Wolenczak with violent intent clear in movements and body language. Doctor Wolenczak used his cane to shoot some sort wide-area blue flash in Dalton's face to stop him. At that point, DXS agent MacGyver grabbed Dalton and removed both DXS and NCIS teams from the suite, relocating to #202 next door. Following that, doctor Wolenczak has isolated himself inside his workroom, doors locked. End report."

The voice from the telephone was angry, but not at the agent. "Bloody redneck southernist micks! Dalton's from Texas, in the deep part of it, and it shows! Every time he has a problem he either bullies or bullshits his way through it, without a care in the world for the consequences! If you wonder why he left Delta Forces, I can tell you it wasn't his choice, and the CIA recuperated him because they thought he'd make a good 'expendable' in case they needed to send in an anonymous head-basher to clean-up after a failed operation. The cold cunt Thornton grabbed him for DXS because of the same reason, plus she had planned to betray the Organization from the moment she set foot inside. I can confirm that the CIA did not fight in any ways to maintain Dalton inside their mantle. Now that Matty-the-Hun is in charge over there, don't expect any improvements. She was let go by the Company because she tends to get too emotionally attached to her 'morals' and her operatives. In a choice between humanity and her people, it's an iffy gamble as to which she'd choose."

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:30pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:30pm (noon)

Their – supposedly – classified & secret conversation was interrupted by the work room doors being yanked opened by an irate adolescent genius with a continent-sized chip on his thin shoulder.

"Spy! We have a shitstorm in progress! I need to talk to your boss or higher in Ottawa Right-Fucking-Now or half of Canada and most of the US north-east will die-off in the coming months, no later than spring thaw 2021!" the boy exclaimed aloud as he trod menacingly towards the CSIS senior agent. Given that he was clutching his infamous cane like he was going to bash somebody soon, in a manner that had the hatchet blade aimed towards him while serving as a knuckle guard, yes the teenager was a credibly menacing figure just now. The agent was aware afterall of what the weapon could do.

Proffering the smartphone towards the teen, the agent said simply "He's online; speak to him".

"Boss-man!" Lucas started up sarcastically in as caustic a tone as he could manage in the circumstances, which was a lot given he could modulate his voice for thirty different languages. "I have some bad news for you, just as much as the USA! And this is more important than the cesspit on fire in DC! The lake Erie shoreline has been breached. When the continental plate shook in repercussion from the Synthium blasts, it caused a massive curving trench, but also several hundred smaller cross-cut trenches that go from the blast epicenter to the large perimeter trench. That means that as we speak, the pressure levels in Lake Erie's fresh soft water basin is no longer positive, it's inferior to the pressure of the in-rushing water from the combined new trenches. And the in-coming waters are all oceanic, all salted, so it will poison the Lake Erie, then go down Niagara Falls and
poison all the Saint-Laurent river basin until it returns to the Atlantic in the mid-north, in the middle of Canada's Maritimes. This will kill off all your agriculture, most of your industry, and millions of humans from lack of water, lack of food and, of course, catastrophic irreversible unemployment as the environment changes without any hopes of coming back to normal."

There was silence at the other end of the line for a few critical seconds as the person was looking at his computer screens and a large wall holding a dozen Internex monitors to survey the entirety of North-America during the Civil Wars and Unrest periods in progress. After close to a minute, the artificial voice asked "What can we do? According to the initial seismic recordings and satellite imagery of the zone, the trench is several hundred yards wide by a handful of kilometers deep. We have nothing that can plug a hole that big. Unless you're a wizard that can conjure a humongous stone wall in a blink, it's pretty much a forgone conclusion that the ecology and society of the north-eastern seaboard will be changed forever from now on."

Lucas made nasty smile that showed a lot of teeth as he looked into the eyes of the senior CSIS agent in front of him, even though it was the phone he was talking with. "Oh, I'm not a wizard, Boss-man. But maybe I could become a druid for a few hours. I have a plan in mind, but I need to have the permission of Andrea Dre and the UEO Cabinet to do it. It requires access to the orbital defense grid, specifically the Copernicus-I manned space-stations. The beam weapons arrays could be the solution, if they're handled with finesse and an astute mind. Like mine. Having the US agents MacGyver, Lund and Davis from suite #202 could help the process along, and increase my odds of actually succeeding."

The voice from the phone came out cold and hard; "SSA! See that he gets what he needs locally. I will call the UEO building in NCQ myself, it will be faster than if I get Ottawa in the mix. Over." and the line went dead.

Shrugging carelessly, the young genius declared "I will be in my workroom, getting the project ready for deployment. Come talk to me the moment things are settled on your end. And send the three US stooges in the moment you find them. No need for an introduction, I know what they are, and why they're here already." The menace in his tone of voice could have been recognized by a deaf man.

The CSIS senior agent tapped a button on his phone screen, sending an aggressive SMS to his subordinate outside in the corridor. He had a conference with Andrea Dre to set up, pronto.

{ SQ } --- { Waking up to the threat they faced } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:35pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:35pm (noon)

Before anybody could make any further comments, there was a pressing knock on the suite's main door, causing the TV to automatically put as principal image the view from the security camera that Lucas had paid to have installed two days ago. It was one of the junior CSIS agents come from suite #204 to speak with them. Because he was still standing, and within three paces of the door, Marty Deeks walked over to open the portal, letting the upset, angry man inside.

Without preamble, the middle-aged man gave orders in terse tones that brooked no challenges. "Okay, people, there's a change in plans. Doctor Wolenczak is pissed at the recent attempt on his welfare by your man over there, but he's willing to overlook the event in lieu of helping The Greater Good of the continent. As such, Dalton, Bozer, Gregorio, Blye and Deeks are all restricted to this suite and will not leave it unless escorted by Canadian officials bearing the formal & clear authority to do so. MacGyver, Lund and Davis are going back to suite #204 to assist Doctor Wolenczak in his efforts to limit the damages that America's suicide has done to the landmass and environmental patterns. Any objections you have are to be sent in writing to your directors who will then argue the
case with mine."

His face getting stormier, and his voice lowering menacingly, the agent added "If you move in any ways differently than the orders I just gave you, you will be declared as hostile agents of an enemy state committing active aggression against us, to be terminated with extreme prejudice. Clear?"

It didn't get any clearer than that; death threats were pretty much a daily occurrence in their jobs, it didn't need further explanations. The three people mentioned took their work packs to follow the CSIS agent. As they reached the door, loud civil defense sirens began wailing in the distance, and the television was taken over by a national emergency protocol that forcibly changed it over to the national Radio Canada channel in english.

Public address begins:

The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, appeared haggard and bleary. In a wavering voice that croaked a few times as he spoke, he declared the establishment of MARTIAL LAWS in Canada immediately.

"Beginning right now, wholesalers & grocers are to implement the sectorial civil defense plans set for rationing fuels, foodstuffs, medicines and critical construction materials necessary for the government to maintain public services and societal peace."

"Any person moving on public lands with a firearm must be its licensed owner, or else it must be stored safely inside a vehicle or dwelling. Otherwise, the weapons concerned will be seized, and a search of the person's properties & workplace will be carried out to find any other guns used irresponsibly. These rules will be applied more loosely, given the troubled times that surround us, if the persons under investigation were physically on their private property or defending against criminals, like a burglary. In order to facilitate the work of police and soldiers, a centralized national gun registry will be established to catalog ALL weapons, including ALL firearms regardless of age, make or provenance, crossbows, bows and spear-guns. Please note that Airsoft style gun replicas and slingshots will not be required to have either a permit nor be registered, but we encourage you very strenuously to not walk around in public with such things anymore until society stabilizes anew."

"To my great regret, despite all my fervent wishes for an open and welcoming society, all land border crossings are now shuttered, as are all airfields and water ports. Only Canadian citizens and permanent residents with valid documentation will be allowed to use the facilities for transport or passage. No movements of non-Canadians in or out are allowed anymore, for an undermined period. Any attempts to pass the borders illegally, in either direction, will be seen as an attempt to enter to commit terrorism and be treated as such via a military tribunal."

"It's my great sadness to follow that with an equally distasteful measure. Americans presently in Canadian soil have 12 hours to report to the nearest police station, fire station or public hospital to be entered into a special database that tracks foreign agents. Failure to voluntarily be registered/tracked will be considered an admission you are in the country illegally, with criminal intents, and will be judged under military rules for terrorists & spies when caught. This measure includes all diplomats, military and police personnel that are on duty, or vacationing, in our lands at this time."

"The following measure was hotly debated in cabinet before being written, but, alas, it must come to pass if our nation of peaceful, law-abiding peoples is to survive. From now on, All christians, regardless of race, gender or age, are forbidden from assembly for the purpose of holding mass,
prayers, sacraments or political activism of any sorts. This covers churches, public plazas, public parks or forests, and also closed settings like a private house or farm yard. ANY attempt at proselytism of minor aged children, or their implication in sectarian activities, are now considered criminal abuse of a dependent person. If it is found that the worshiper/preacher/cult/church tried to actively recruit for, or follow the lead of, ANY racial supremacy creed or similar Theocratic Regency sympathy, it will be declared a treasonous endeavor to raise an insurrection army against the Canadian people, and thus destroyed without mercy. They will not even get a trial, if they resist arrest with guns and bombs."

"Finally, given the present state of society & economy following the anti-sect hack two days ago, the precarious situation of the continent's damaged environment, and the temporary uncertainty about food supplies, the Canadian government has decided the following. Any criminals, be they domestic or foreign, spies, terrorists, and 'regular' illegal immigrants will now be judged and sentenced by military tribunals under the precepts of the 'Abbreviated Martial Laws for Canadian Civil Society'. Those condemned under military laws to jail time totaling longer than 5 years will be executed. The method of killing for a specific convict will not be disclosed. Their family will not be notified, and no public notice of the event will ever be made. The moment you are condemned to capital execution is the date & time of death that will be entered into your official record. Those condemned to less than that limit will be assigned to do public works without any pay or compensation. This includes maintenance along the southern ground border, plus other manual jobs normally delegated to low-grade employees or temporary contractors for the federal government's ministry of transports & public works."

"Of course, further details will be broadcast as they are available. I thank you for your time, your patience, and your much appreciated collaboration with our brave soldiers, police officers and paramedics in these troubled times. May you find shelter and solace in the loving arms of your family, until this crisis is passed."

Prime Minister Trudeau looked into the camera with reddened eyes that showed how much he had cried and struggled with these decisions. Nobody would know in this life how much he had fought against these measures, or why he was passing them anyways. Any mandatory recordings of the cabinet's emergency meetings would not be declassified for 100 years, so it would matter only for historians, if the society survived long enough to recover sufficiently to produce scholars again.

Public address ends

Wearing grim faces, the trio of American agents walked out, going back into the presence of the person who would most likely be deciding if they lived or died.

{ SQ } --- { Diagnosing the planet's injuries } --- { SQ } 

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 15:45pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 12:45pm (noon)

The Americans were greeted by controlled capharnaum when they entered suite #204. The Canadians were clustered around the dining table with varied laptops and tablets showing maps of the eastern portion of North America, some on the surface and others had geological surveys.

Surprisingly, the door to the first bedroom was opened, letting out the loud humming of high voltage running through circuits accompanied by the wooshing of multiple fans pushing cold air through the
Somebody shouted at them harshly, bringing all their attention to the large TV screen on the wall, where the Canadian minister of national defense was in the process of detailing the procedures for martial laws, with a few quick rules-of-thumb for citizens to avoid trouble.

"You bozos see that? That's because of your damned mess that we're at that extreme. Threatening to grab & hold anybody just because of admin snafus or expired papers! It's like we're back in WW-II again! What next? Internment camps for all Americans? If you yahoos don't want to find out just how bad things get from here on out, you get your stinking asses in that room and help the kid repair what you broke! And don't you sass or disrespect him any! If he tells us to shoot you morons, we'll do it with pleasure, and never lose a wink on it! Now get!"

Putting on their game faces while confronted by the vitriolic distemper of the senior CSIS agent on site, the three field agents walked through the workroom doors, closing them behind themselves to separate from the roiling anger outside. They were surprised to find the office was almost completely dark, with only a little light coming from computer screens, LED's set in dials and server stack status diodes. There were network cables, power wires, and odd transparent pipes carrying fluid, all snaking around the shadowy floor, all with some form of illumination in them by miniature fiber-optics lines woven into the armoring of the lengthy connection devices.

As they took in the appearance of the barren room and the six large rolling modules of equipment, a chill went through their spines. In the far, near the inert fireplace and service counter were a large command station with keyboard and multiple screens deployed, and a fabrication device that was in the process of 3D printing/milling something. In the sector near the door were two cabinets that seemed to be nothing but stacks of server circuit boards, data modules and power conduits, all glowing in a menacing shade of swamp water greenish blue. Pushed back into the door-less closet were two square boxy things that were closed tight, their purposes unidentifiable from a distance.

Sitting in a large rolling wooden frame chair with thick upholstery and many electronics attached was Lucas Wolenczak. He was positioned between the fabricator and tall glowing cabinet, in front of the square boxes stored in the closet. His face was partially hidden behind thin expensive designer glasses that carried a lot of customized electronics that were, oddly enough, the only system in the room that didn't glow while active. The three technicians easily recognized the meta-glasses for what they were, and understood the teenager was presently bypassing the physical keyboard and switches on the command console for a faster input device, due to the quickly devolving mess outside.

All three clearly saw the armament-cane standing between his legs, clutched tightly by both hands on the pommel, the ax-blade towards them. The entire weapon had blue veins that glowed eerily in each layer of its frame, giving it a multi-tone depth that looked like a tiny cylindrical nebula. A pair of thin but armored cables, also riddled with glowing blue veins, poured from the teen's left shirt sleeve to connect securely to the main barrel of the cane, in recessed sockets. An indistinct low hum seemed to emanate from the boy's person, or equipment; even when the Americans were three feet away, it was hard to tell exactly what the sound was, because of how low and soft it was.

"I have brought you here for a specific reason." the boy's voice startled them as it came from everywhere all at once, through speakers hidden inside the machinery boxes, filling the cold dark room with dreadful malice that chilled their blood. "Your presence is not of my own choosing, rest assured of that." he specified, his anger at their invasion of his domain evident even for the slowest dimwit they could find.

Luminescent, eerily blue eyes moved behind the meta-glasses, spearing them threateningly with a silent promise of inhuman pain if they sabotaged the jobs they would be commanded to accomplish.
Again, all three felt a shiver of dread crawl down their spines as they contemplated just how powerful this kid truly was, that he could grab, manipulate and change a planetary catastrophe to his will.

"Miss Davis will find a chair to sit at the command console. Her primary function will be to insure that the satellite and cell comms work at all times. Otherwise, she will research through what still functions of the Internex to bring up those concepts and specialty studies we need to accomplish our work. If necessary, she will back all three of us during our more mathematically challenging periods by feeding the calculations to the system, instead of us wasting time on basal data crunching."

Pointing at the two men, Lucas growled lowly; "Both of you will find some chairs and at least two tablets or laptops each to use as your displays. Ask the CSIS agents if you don't have sufficient equipments in your kits to do what I say. You will serve as my mathematical co-processors and, occasionally, spare 'instincts' while I control the tools to patch the continental plate."

With pursed lips and a fierce scowl, the teen griped "Well, don't just stand there! Find your damn chairs and equipments so I can tell you how to plug into my network! We don't have all day, the disaster at the other end of the continent won't fix itself without help!"

It took two minutes for the three technicians to grab themselves some chairs in the dining room, much to the displeasure of the CSIS agents who lost them and were now obliged to call hotel service for extras to have enough seats. Once back in the workroom, the Americans unpacked and connected their computers according to the tersely spoken instructions of their temporary supervisor. The teenager was short tempered, abrupt, and prone to nasty comments about the USA and its government in general. It surprised all three agents that the young man managed to stay civil towards their persons though, even if he was much less well-mannered than in their vidphone conferences of earlier days.

Lucas aimed squinted eyes at the agents, contemplating what happened next. "Come here around the main command hub. You need to see the sensor imagery to understand the situation." the boy told them, in a tone of voice that was cold but less aggressive than initially.

Pointing at the two images displayed side-by-side on two of the large monitors of the command console, the genial adolescent explained the problem. "As you can see, the continental shelf's eastern coast has shattered under a catastrophic explosion that caused telluric shock waves, which vibrations in turn caused a 'subduction' effect that liquefied the under-layers, thus removing any vertical support. Without underpinnings to hold it aloft, the stone shelf's overhanging portions strained until they cracked, then moved apart eastwards until the split-off pieces settled down on the revealed bedrock into new positions."

Creating a yellow fluorescent line in the screen to highlight the problem to solve, the young male continued his tersely voiced explanation. "Here is the thing that can kill off all of North-America inside of the coming 12 months if we don't fix it post haste. This is what Internex Mappe Mundia analysts have called 'The Great Eastern Split'; a great arcing crack in the continent's bedrock, that now links Lake Erie's vital soft waters with hundreds of new rivers filling-up with much colder oceanic salt water. In order for the plants, animals and humans to live, they need soft water as ocean/sea water cannot be drunk by land-based lifeforms. As it is, the massive 'Great Split' will either drain the Great Lakes' potable waters towards the south and into the Atlantic, or else bring in salt water up north thus poisoning all the Saint-Laurent seaway's basin from Erie all the way to the outflows of the river in the north. That means among other things that cities like Detroit, Buffalo, Toronto, Montreal and Quebec would no longer have access to this system for drinkable water. Dozens of major towns and a hundred villages would need to rebuild and re-calibrate their entire aqueduct networks, and sewage as well. If they don't rebuild their water management systems..."
immediately, they face massive loss of population and those that remain will be struck by unsanitary living conditions without flowing water, and the afferent epidemics of disease that always accompany badly managed municipal hydrology basins. Our task, as large as it is, is to plug that damned leak in the shores of the Lake Erie before the water system is either drained or poisoned."

Sebastian Lund rose an index finger, wiggling it around to ask for the right to speak. Getting a nod, he asked aloud "How exactly are we going to do that from here? For that fact, what kind of tools could you possibly wield to 'patch-up' that fault line? It's around 500 yards wide, and a lot more in several places. Not to mention the depth."

Lucas smiled widely as he pointed at the third screen of the command console; it was showing a rendered animated view of the planet's orbital traffic. Including several hundred supposedly classified military satellites that the public wasn't allowed to know about freely. The kinds of satellites that carried weapons not authorized under the UEO Treaty's founding clauses; pulse weapons capable of targeting the Earth's surface assets, nuclear missiles and laser arrays of far greater capacity than just needed to destroy small missiles sent to attack the space-stations themselves. It was this type of weapon that Lucas counted on to rectify the impending doom that hung over North-America.

"When made aware of the problem, our good lady Andrea Dre, in her capacity as secretary general of the UEO Cabinet, gave me access to the Alliance's orbital defense grid." he spoke with great sarcasm upon mentioning the woman's name and credentials. "The Hammerfell-I pulse cannons will crack the bedrock and debris to the desired consistency, then the Basilisk-II laser arrays will serve as welding torches to melt the rock and sediment until the formation of a plug sufficient to permanently segregate the two water bodies. Until, that is, somebody decides to build some sort of canal with locks and a management system that will keep the potable water inside Lake Erie, rather than waste it down the 'Great Split' and the new salt water rivers that just appeared all along its length."

Angus was looking at the images with disbelieving, wide round eyes, trying to mentally compute what would need to happen for the project to become reality. He had a very basic knowledge of the orbiting defense platforms and their CWIS lasers weapons, but not the other secret systems, certainly not the in-depth analysis that Doctor Wolenczak possessed. The fact the UEO had given over to the adolescent executable control access meant that he had also received the analytics programs and apps that showed the status and usefulness of each satellite in function. The screen displayed some highly compartmented & secret informations that select people in Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and probably Micronesia too, would gladly kill to see, let alone actually get a copy.

Agent Lund opined aloud "You'll need to do more than just crack rock and melt it. The continental shelf has cracked down for almost a mile, averaging 400 - 800 yards in separation/movement. You'll never have enough material to fill up the crack, no matter how much you work the trench. It's like when you dig a grave to bury a body; even with the coffin in the hole, you always end up with a shallow pit at the end because the refilled earth is more compact and placed differently. In this case, it's worse because there wasn't any excavation or mining, only a net sideways motion of the bedrock that created a void that is now being filled by various water bodies, from rerouted rivers or oceanic back-flow."

Smirking amusedly, the teenager mentally changed the display on screen #1 to show a geological survey with seismic data points and a superimposed geophysical analysis grid, including telluric stress, fault lines, and pyroclastic event potentials. Displayed in stark contrast were the hundreds of dull blue masses representing the encroaching waters of the Atlantic as they rushed into the voids, versus the vibrant electric blue of the potable soft water bodies that were also moving erratically as they tried to find the new lowest point of their beds.

Gesturing with his left hand, Lucas explained "I am well aware of the fact that there will never, in
any reality, be enough material to back-fill the trench. It would take about a hundred 10-ton trucks on
each side working for close to a year to fill in enough rocks, stones, sand, debris and vegetal detritus
to create a durable clog in this new river. My goal is to punch down through bedrock, into the
magma mantle, to unleash a controlled pyroclastic event. An artificial, limited, volcano. The satellites' pulse cannons will dig through the stone layer, then the lasers will maintain the lava's temperature to ensure fluidity despite the wintry chill and frigid waters in the trench, at the location. I will have to
create a thin but long fissure for the lava to rise through, but once the chimney is formed, it should fill-in quite easily. The trick will be to time the cessation of laser fire to make certain the plug is fully formed and solid, without losing control of the nascent volcano so it doesn't become a wild rampaging thing like the Kilauea."

MacGyver closed his eyes, fists clenched tightly at his sides as he tried to control his breathing out of fear he would end up shouting in anger. Every choice in life had consequences, especially the biggest, far-reaching choices made by governments. This choice being made by the teenager and the UEO Cabinet would sacrifice tens of thousands in a poor town that was already shaken and split apart by the forces of a vengeful Mother Nature who'd had enough of human idiocy.

"Toledo. You're sacrificing the town, the people, of Toledo, on the shores of Lake Erie..." whispered Riley, her soft voice thick with emotions she could barely hold in check anymore. Turning towards the seated boy, she asked louder "Are you really going to do this? Start a bloody volcano in the middle of a city, just like that?"

Taking his glasses off to massage the bridge of his nose, Agent Lund asked rhetorically "What else do you want to do, Riley? What other tools or options are you sitting on, that we use that instead? You can ask your partner here, and he'll tell you too. There are no other options that can fill-in that crack in the Earth's crust. Even a small tactical nuclear warhead would only make a wider crater because the explosion would excavate and move out the debris, not actually fill anything, no matter how badly damaged the canyon sides would become during the blast. Any stone slab that collapses from the canyon walls would simply leave voids and new cracks through which the unwanted water movements and mixing would happen."

Putting his glasses back on, the forensics specialist detailed "This ugly solution is all based on the basics of volumetry, geometry, geophysics, hydrology, seismology and vulcanology. You need material to fill in that gap BUT explosions don't fill in anything. If we don't plug that new river, it will in fact contaminate the Lake Erie, then all the waters going downstream from there will become unusable by ground life in a matter of barely five to seven months as the water follows the natural channels and seasonal patterns. The entire north-east sector of the USA in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont and Maine, along with Canada's provinces of Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, will all become desolate wastelands as the populations migrate away from the contaminated salt water that will kill off millions of fish, algae, and land animals over the next year. The place will be an open air charnel field, with dead carcasses all along the shores of the Great Lakes Erie & Ontario, then down the St-Lawrence river. The presence of so much oceanic water flowing in that current-channel will eventually change the climate patterns of warmth and humidity for thousands of miles in length and an easy five hundred miles in width."

Angus opened his eyes again, their usually vibrant green now dull and dead, as he contemplated concepts and methods he would have sworn to you just last week that he would never in this life consider using. "Stop arguing with reality, Riley. This is what we cut ourselves, and meat that's been cut can't be put back together. This is the Butcher's Bill come due. We pay it now, or we pay far worse in just a few months, when spring comes and millions of people all around the Saint-Laurent hydrological basin are stuck trying to live off salt water. Especially when all the vegetation and livestock are dying around them but they can't stop it."
With trembling hands, Angus began to scroll through the telluric and pyroclastic analytics displayed on his personal laptop, mentally calculating the best way to puncture the planet's crust to create the first ever artificial volcano in the History of Humanity. Somehow, for some reason, he didn't feel good about this discovery of new terraforming techniques, despite that being a scientist and innovator had always been his greatest pride & joy in life.

Besides him, agent Lund and Riley got to work as well, their own hands trembling, but their attention sharp and focused on the tasks they were assigned by their 'momentary supervisor'. Sebastian wore a grim expression, as if he were doing the autopsy of a dear friend, while Riley seemed to be fighting against herself to hold in the tears she knew would help nothing anymore.

Seated deeply inside his thickly padded chair, immersed in the tenebrous ethers of the neuroplexic network, the teenager watched them, their colleagues next door, the CSIS agents in the next room, the hotel's inhabitants and the squads of police and soldiers outside. He was now all-seeing, but himself silent and unseen. He wouldn't again be caught unawares by a physical attack like Jack Dalton almost did, mere minutes ago. If somebody thought they could use his 'apparent' concentration on the terraforming work and orbital traffic, then they would have a nasty surprise. When he was totally ensconced inside the neural system, he didn't lose any control of his body at all, but was instead seeing it from outside like the 3rd person view in an adventure (RPG) video game. He could still maneuver his body, but it felt slow, sluggish even, like a marionette with weighted limbs at the ends of inflexible wires.

But he still saw.

And heard.

And understood.

And he could still defend his person fully.

Yes, anybody trying to damage him or kidnap him during his work would get a nasty surprise indeed, just like those morons in the next suite would get, if the idiotic plan to abscond him back to the USA they had just hatched was ever tried for real. They really should learn to not speak aloud of secret black-ops plans in rooms that were equipped with electronics, let alone domotics controls, when their target was one of the planet's best hackers alive.

Miserable twits. They would all get what they deserved.

{ SQ } --- { The Copernicus-I station network } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 16:20pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 13:20pm

The central monitor of the Cyberghast Hub began displaying the stats for each of the 36 orbiting machines built between 2002 and 2015. They were assembled side-by-side in humanity's only existing space dock, a gangly structure composed of a few living quarters, workshops and three garages to park robotic telemanipulation arms when they needed repairs or shelter from clouds space debris following accidents.

Each station was assembled from prefabricated modules that were completely assembled on Earth then shipped up to orbit via the venerable Martin-Marietta Avionics' orbital ascent carrier 'Blue Swan'. This was a massive jet plane built along the size and shape of the plane that usually carried the old USA space shuttles between recovery site and prep/launching facilities. The giant plane was boosted in size to accommodate twelve of MMA's custom designed VariVex-I tilting turbojet
engines fed with Superon synthetic liquid fuel. The plane had three engines on each wing, plus four in the belly to help vertical lift then altitude sustentation, and a last pair in the tail-end to give an extra push during the atmospheric escape phase. The space station modules were all designed to fit either inside the plane's cavernous belly or the clawed cradle apparatus that was on its back.

Each orbiter was composed of a single central tower that was 50 feet wide by 1,000 feet long, separated, in modules of 50 x 200. Attached to the sides of the stations were lateral spokes 20 feet wide by 100 feet long, placed in 2 clusters of 4, to hard-link the 'dangerous' parts of the constructs in a '+' shape. These outer modules were four water, wastes, liquid fuel & gas depots, one quarantine quarters for sick people, one cargo reception & analysis warehouse, and two Patriot-VI interceptor missiles batteries. There were four large mobile arrays that combined a 100' wide parabolic antennae with an optical telescope and vari-cams, each located atop the fluids & wastes modules to give 360º coverage in all 3 dimensions around the stations.

It is important to know that just like the SeaQuest, these stations were built by the USA then dumped on the UEO as a means to pay membership dues without actual cash-in-hand being spent by the Trump administration. That means that while the UEO Treaty is the nominal owner, much of the command & control was still exerted by Washington DC due to a lack of desire from the UEO Cabinet to fight them on the subject, although Andrea Dre had become quite vocal about it since February 2020 after the appearance of the Chaodai as a new planetary menace. The situation meant that presently, with the Civil War going on, not all stations were responding as they should, and it was suspected that at least four were under the control of astronauts who were avowed christian fanatics, especially sincet no comms were coming from those specific orbiters anymore.

At 16:20pm on Vancouver's clock, three of the 36 active Copernicus-I class manned space-stations realigned from their far-Atlantic defensive perimeter duties over to positions 100 kilometers apart, in a straight line centered on top of Toledo (Ohio) on a north-to-south alignment similar to the Great Eastern Split trench that had been created less than an hour ago. The large pulse cannon turrets extruded from their alcoves hidden in the main body of the stations while the ship-killing laser arrays in the very end of the fuselage opened the iris hatches that covered them. Each weapon system was powered directly by its own dedicated cold-fusion reactor, independent from the stations' other functions so that combat could be continued under remote control, regardless of what happened to the human crews inside the titanesque floating steel and aluminum constructs.

The pulse cannons each fired with a punching power of 50,000 pounds per square inch in variable patterns of beam, fan, cone, or a cloud-like strafing volley of 30 short thick bolts to act as CWIS when intercepting vehicles and projectiles at medium ranges.

The main assault lasers fired roughly 10 terajoules of coherent (plasma / photonic / X-ray) energy in a continuous round beam 3 yards wide, on a range of 3,000 kilometers in good conditions. That was about 1/6 of the 'standard' atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945, but concentrated inside a mere few feet. This allowed the lasers' beam to either cut or incinerate, depending on how many fractions of a second the contact with the target area lasted.

Snort! It's wasn't like these things had a 'stun setting' to be gentle like they did in Star Trek.

The truly important particularity of both weapons arrays was that, in full contravention of UEO Treaty clauses, they could be polarized to operate in the part of the spectrum invisible to human eyes to commit a silent (discrete) sniping on critical targets that couldn't be reached safely otherwise. It also saved a lot of paperwork at borders, and avoided the melodrama of political & societal fallout if an insertion team was captured & traced back to its patron country. For those few people who knew about it, this was exactly the kind of factually accurate 'crime' that fed the rumor mill, giving credence to conspiracy theorists around the world.
It wasn't delusional paranoia if it existed for real.

The only thing even the extremists at Info Wars, Breitbart, Fox News and their cohorts would snort at derisively was the presence of nuclear missiles. Six ion rocket propelled Flagpole-I hydrogen warhead missiles were stored in each orbital station, carrying seven drone warheads of 10 megatons. Given the ages of the owners/reporters in these far-right & sectarian organizations, all of whom had been born during the Cold War period, having nukes on any space station was expected, given the need to stop the progression of communist and rogue nations.

Or, spoken truthfully; the need for American white evangelicals to rule the world without fearing retribution strikes right inside their homeland bases, the same way they had imposed on everybody else since the medieval Crusades. There would be no muslim caliph seizing Constantinople then battering his way up to the gates of Vienna or Budapest this time around!

Wasn't it in fact what Mike Pence said publicly on TV, in August 2018? That "America needs a space force to dominates space unilaterally to ensure the future of religious freedom, even in those nations that don't want it", ehm? Well, if it wasn't said aloud that specific way, it was certainly the subtext the evangelicals, and the rest of humanity, heard loud and clear. It was a good thing then, for humanity at large, that the white-skinned worshipful cretins didn't realize they already had a space fleet up there, or else they might have woken up in time to keep their incompetent dumb-ass-in-chief from giving it off cheap to the UEO. Or they may have swallowed his bullshit that it was an Obama creation, therefore impure and un-christian, and applauded as he gave it all away to the planetary alliance Cabinet.

No, the atomic missiles surprised no-one born passed 1950, not even the anti-government activists or the geriatric religious fanatics. After 70 decades of nuclear threats hanging over the planet, it was just too expected by everybody to get a reaction out of fringe-cooks, or politicians, anymore.

But anyways...

It was the INVISIBLE beam weapons (you can't see where to dodge) that struck cowardly, in silence, from orbit, 3,000km away, that had every numb-nut right-winger a-flutter with testicular spasms. The fact the government had built such illicit, unsuspectable, murderous capacity right above the heads of the poor, maligned populace of America. That was grist for the mill indeed. Even if said right-wingers would have built the exact same systems to take out their extensive lists of personal nemeses that never stopped getting longer. Pretty much like Larouche's family cult & followers, in the late 1990's and early 2000's, who kept on harping about "beast-men" and "my enemies in DC". Or Steve Bannon, Bill O'Reily, Alex Jones, Billy Graham, James Dobson, Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, David Duke, Roy Moore, D.J.Trump, and hordes of countless others in the same vein. All these dishonest gurus, priests, apostolates and self-styled 'revealers of Hidden Truths (From Above)' were all the same. Simplistic cowardly bullies, exploiters, racists, and unstable psychotic gurus who dreamed of mass-murdering anybody that disagreed with their fanatical delusions, or saw through their fake-news, false-flagged bullshit for what it was, then exposed them publicly for it.

Hypocrisy was such a fundamental virtue for life amongst humans.

Especially for manipulating organized religion and racial-division politics.

Lucas blinked his eyes physically and virtually to clear his mind from maudlin thoughts that were swimming freely around his subconscious. The problem with having such a wide breadth of education coupled with an eidetic memory all merged with a massive data collection capacity was that he could very easily get lost along the meanders of his own brain, borne by the strong relentless currents of factoids, trivia, and massively augmented perceptual inputs. Focusing anew on the
geological analysis and vulcanology models proposed by his erstwhile brain-trust, the teenager did his own data crunching to spit out a validation model of his own crafting.

No, he didn't trust either of the three adults in the room with him.

Not with his life, health, freedom, or even the clearly self-serving effort at limiting environmental damages to the remains of the USA. It wasn't paranoia, it was hard earned experience backed by the elucubrations of the dumb muscle-bound minions in the suite next door. That, plus the fact that they would get only one chance at getting this maneuver right, or else they would become the proud parents of the planet's only artificial volcano, thus causing worse damages than what the Synthium blasts had done. Especially in light of the fact the nukes were one-off; the volcano would last for years and could even go quiescent for decades, or centuries, before blowing up again just for shits and giggles.

Mother Nature was fun like that...

Yeah, better not make any mistakes, especially ones caused by laziness or carelessness.

{ SQ } --- { Yet another problem unforeseen } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 16:27pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 13:27pm

Clearing his throat loudly, the boy warned his colleagues about the upcoming sequence of events. "Okay, people, get ready for the show. The satellites have opened their weapons ports and preheated the emitter systems to operational specs. I will be setting the beams to full spectrum frequencies and polarities in order to maintain the coherence, density and energy dispersal on target-point required for this to work. If anybody out there sees the damned columns of light coming down from the skies and panics, they can write their congressmen about it to complain because I won't give a hoot."

The three captive techs merely gazed at the seated boy, staying silent and morose as they wondered if he expected some sort of response or was threatening them – again – just pro forma to keep things on tracks. After a few seconds of silence, the adolescent genius closed his eyes, fully immersing in the neuroplexic interface, swimming agilely through the unseen ethers of the cyber-world until he reached the three satellites in orbit, closing his mental grasp around them, penetrating their command nodes insidiously, violating the processor cores and data stacks in a way that would be seen as a rape in any culture that analyzed the event.

Going against the terms he had verbally agreed with Andrea Dre, Lucas didn't limit himself to simply activating and guiding the weapons to dam the trench. No, he had much loftier and impressive goals in mind, which were now legitimized given the slew of illegal weapons and spying systems he found as he went along a detailed inspection of the space-stations' physical modules. Shamelessly, the teen used his temporary UEO Cabinet-level access codes to punch through biometric sensors, user-recognition gates, comms traffic monitoring & censorship apps, military firewalls, automated roving patrol bots and real-time human analysts until he reached the bedrock of the cyber-world; the circuit boards.

The teenager exclaimed inside his mind "Oh, bloody Hell! This guy's dumber than a drunk circus monkey! Where did he get his diploma? The vodka vat in a frat house keg party? Please, don't let me age old enough to become like him!"

Before his virtual eyes was the very proof of human idiocy made material; the servers aboard the Copernicus stations were purposefully designed and built CHEAP, as in thrift-store recycled equipment CHEAP. Whomever had created the designs to this network had willingly and
specifically bought everything at least five years older than the signature date on the orders that authorized the build of the manned space-stations.

Why? Lucas just couldn't wrap his head around it, so he dug.

Then he found the answer.

The one he didn't want to see.

It started with a simple search on the identity of who was in charge of the Copernicus-I project; the governmental managers and congressional surveillance committees atop the situation. That led to finding the multiple factories who built the hundreds of modules, and their subcontractors who built the millions of smaller individual parts. Through it all, one name kept returning in focus as being present in all levels of management, design, production, assembly, and even in congressional oversight hearings; doctor of engineering and cybernetics Lambert Depure.

This idiot was the brother-in-law of the very well known evangelical prosperity Gospel preacher Samuel of Reliance. That was the only name he used in public; a made-up moniker like the popes, but Reliance was the actual small town in Delaware, on the border with Maryland, where his large 7,000 seat church was built. Lambert Depure had married the preacher's younger sister in the 1980's and was quick to credit the influx of Divine Grace into his life from that family alliance for all the promotions and plaudits in his jobs at NASA's offices on Capitol Hill. A deep search on the preacher showed that his brother-in-law had been giving small sums to the church's missionary fund before the marriage, and steadily enlarged both tithes and special donations along the years.

This didn't compute.

Mathematically, it was obvious this guy was giving more than 60% of his yearly salary to the church, but never lowered his spending habits nor lessened his family's lifestyle. The answer became obvious quickly. Depure was strong-arming his subordinates at NASA into giving him 'tithes' for the 'Good Lord' in exchange for positive employee performance evaluations rated one or two grades above the required ratios to avoid an internal audit by Human Resources dpt. These kickbacks allowed the crud to give large sums to his preacher-in-law and get applauded by the worshipers when his donations were displayed at the twice-yearly 'special missionary' collection events, thus keeping peace with his wife, the in-laws, and seeming an excellent leader and community man in the eyes of everybody.

Then, the money collected under the table from underlings wasn't enough to satisfy the ever hungry church or its delusional, self-glorifying preacher anymore. Depure began to embezzle money from NASA and the US DOD to keep up with the imperious demands for greater, more glorious amounts of money. However, given the multiple internal verifications done yearly plus the Inspector General's Office that watched over NASA's financial and personnel situation, there came a very strictly delimited point at which Depure couldn't find cash to steal anymore. So he improvised like only a fanatic motivated by fear of public shaming inside his church-group could manage.

It was the period to design the cybernetic systems for the Copernicus stations' network and back in early 2000's, all computing equipments were VERY expensive because they were all shiny and new. This was even worse for government networks due to the old, deeply embedded, tradition of gouging the Feds on whatever contract you got since that could be the only hard and reliable profit you made in the decade. When military purchase plans were happening, things got way out of control for everybody since the Brass always wanted things that were 'custom built' just for them so that nobody could ever steal it to use in illicit systems. That meant hardened casings, shielded cabling, anti-shock jelly pads, integrated surge protection breakers, duo-processor boards for speed & safety in case one chip got overheated or shorted out, and stacks of RAM like it was going out of fashion by the weekend. Then you added a proprietary operating system (OS) with tens of programs.
for specific machines or functions seen only aboard a manned space station.

Bleh! So much money for so little effect...

It was easy to see what the amateurish criminal moron did. Any little kid who wants to maximize his allowance learns to do the same before reaching secondary school. Lambert Depure completely skipped out any public tenders of offers, instead contacting a single manufacturer of low-cost systems destined to the educational market. He negotiated an illegal process of kickbacks through which NASA / US DOD would pay the supplier prices that were grossly inflated for genuine military quality devices when instead they received family-grade machines & programs. The supplier would thusly get his full asking price plus a hefty bonus, all the while returning the overpaid balance as cash under-the-table directly to Depure who would then budget his tithes & donations to the church, up to five years in advance to make certain he didn't go broke or have to slow down his lifestyle.

Spurred on by the threat of public shaming in his faith congregation, and losing face in front of his wife and children, the old bureaucrat kept on siphoning money out of NASA all the way until his retirement in early 2015, when the first Copernicus combat space-station was activated and confirmed functional. The old bastard got his due justice though, since his entire family lived in Reliance, right inside the secondary damage zone of the nuclear blasts. That, plus the fact that the massive earthquake had split the entirety of Delaware, with a quarter of Maryland, right off the mainland thus turning it into a charred island whipped by hurricane winds, scalding grayish rain and the occasional piece of solid debris that was still coming down when ejected from the spinning column of Natural Wrath.

Imbecile. Him, his family, his in-laws, and the group of cock-shakers that they all gathered with.

Maybe they'd like to write him a postcard from Paradise to tell him how's the weather?

He'd answer back with several lines of language so filthy that St-Peter would have a hard time letting it pass inside the Pearly Gates, and would wince just at holding the incendiary missive.

Lucas REALLY hated incompetents, especially when they were made incompetent artificially by the virulent poison of the peasant superstition called religion.

The entire armada of weaponized space-stations were obsolete before lights-on.

 Barely 5 years into their active service with an estimated 100 year lifespan for the hulls and engine blocks, but kitted out with computers, life-support monitors and targeting programs that were already over 15 years out of date on the moment the first generation ion rockets were fired the first time in space dock. It was like they were running the entire USA / NAC / UEO space warfare program on Windows 3.11 and loving it!

The teenager wanted to vomit, so affected by contempt and anger he was.

How in the many hard-pumping FUCKS had nobody ever found out about this? How was it that the astronauts had never raised concerns about the slow, unwieldy, outdated systems? There was a dozen astronauts per station, living 12 month rotations for each of the 36 giant constructs. Surely SOMEBODY would have told something to someone at some point in time? Where the bloody Hell were the admirals and generals in charge of the project? What did the General Accounting Office of the Armed Services or the bloody Congress do in all this time? Wasn't there a senatorial oversight committee?

Aaaaarrgghhh!!!!!
The adolescent was well beyond rabid at this point. This network wasn't just slower than the normal Internex when compared to his neuroplexic frequency, it was actually slower than the antiquated CIA backup server he had been hacking recently. How in all the flames of Hell Everburning was he going to get anything done today? Slowly and painstakingly, that's how it was going to happen. Not like he had any choices in the matter anymore. They were pressed back against a stone wall, blade at the neck and running out of air to breathe; what other option could they use?

Setting his powerful mind to task, the teenager began to whelm the Copernicus stations to their own baleful affairs, hoping that it would be enough to avert the developing catastrophe.

{ SQ } --- { Pimple on the face of Gaea } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 16:35pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 13:35pm

The few hundred people still alive in the region of Toledo, Ohio, were not even recovered from the earthquake that hit their town so bad that it cracked the ground, splitting asunder the town in two asymmetrical pieces that were partly fallen into the frigid icy waters of Lake Erie. Nobody was yet recovered from the news about the nuclear blast in Washington DC that had caused the earthquake to begin with. There was also no way they were recovered from the simultaneous Youth Revolt and Religious War that were wracking the entire country for the last two days.

So this wasn't a good day for anybody, but then it got worse.

Dropping from the cloud laden skies overhead came a dozen massive blue beams of pure kinetic force that rammed down into the newly created watery trench, a mile away from the lake shore, reaching all the way down to newly exposed bedrock, cracking and tearing apart the solid strata with enough traumatic force to make the earth shake again for the second – perceptible – time of the day. Then the twelve beams began spreading farther apart while following the new trench, emitting torturous sounds of crunching rock, churning water and telluric vibrations strong enough to cause sounds to waft up from under the snowy grounds.

After five minutes of intense merciless pummeling by those alien blue beams, they stopped, only to be replaced by three thinner but denser red ones that seared the very air as they lanced down from above the ceiling of gray winter clouds. The red beams heralded something far worse though, as the waters in the trench splitting Toledo were now glowing from the depths, emanating an eerie reddish glow that had the more religious citizens believe that the Gates of Hell were opening beneath the remains of their broken town.

They weren't completely wrong, even if the explanation was much more mundane.

At exactly 13:42pm on Toledo's clock, the city was rocked by a series of strong earthquakes centered about a mile back from the junction of the 'Great Eastern Split' trench and the frozen, ice-caked shoreline of Lake Erie. These temblors were powerful, short, and spaced out by mere seconds, matching the heightened boiling and glowing of the waters in the fault line that was now raising a massive cloud of scalding steam above the region.

Two minutes later and the few living citizens of Toledo knew their time in this life had come to its end as the reddish glow and monstrous stinking cloud filled with ash and toxic gases were explained by the emergence of incandescent lava from the depths of the cold watery injury on the face of America. The massive bank of poisonous fog that settled over the area finished off the poor, destitute and desperate populace inside of five minutes after the lava flows broke the surface of the salted sea waters, creating an irregular but thick, turgid plug in the leak that threatened to poison or drain the Great Lakes of North-America, and the Saint-Laurent seaway at the same time.
The lava kept on flowing though, and the three red beams were not letting up. Instead, the outer beams were slowly moving apart from the central beam which maintained exactly the same position. Under the relentless assault from the orbiting weapons, the artificial geodesic chimney was lengthening, allowing more molten rock to surge up from the Earth's mantle, the scorching red basaltic stone raising above the lip of the trench by several yards. When the volcanic funnel stood fifty yards above the trench's lips, a flurry of short thick blue bolts descended from the heavens to flatten out the gooey cooling lava, spreading it over the rims of the canyon to establish as tight a seal as possible. The goal was also to keep the quickly solidifying mass a few feet above the ground level to make certain that any excess salt water from the trench would be retained by a solid, hermetical dike of dense crystalline basaltic stone that would last for centuries. The pulse bolts massaged, kneaded and spread the warm lava for 300 yards on each side of the trench, creating a 10' high by 30' thick wall on the northern side of the eruptive chimney.

The lasers kept on coming, heating the pyroclastic well shaft until it was close to 1,500 yards in length, then they stopped. At that point, more strafing runs of pulse bolts came down, flattening the volcanic funnel and gouging a wide, deep pattern into the cooling stone, like a gigantic router carving a piece of wood to create a decorative pattern. The space-stations created a pair of parallel channels that were separated by 50 yards of quickly solidifying rock. Each channel was 100 yards wide by 1,200 yard long and 50 yards deep but capped at each end by 30 yards of densely packed molten basalt. These were the basic chambers of the future water locks that would allow humanity to use the new trench to float cargo and people without losing or polluting the fresh soft waters of Lake Erie and the Saint-Laurent river basin. All that would be needed now was a massive engineering team and a couple of decades to build up a system similar to those used in other canals like Panama or Suez to make the dead town of Toledo live again, all the while also having a decent revenue for it and Ohio around them.

It would take almost three full days for the lava to finish cooling down, now that the magma chimney was plugged tightly, and the poisonous cloud of laze would last for close to two full weeks before the atmosphere cooled down enough to no longer bear aloft the weight of its heavy particulates. The soot and crystallized gases would precipitate as brackish gray rain for five days before the skies were clear enough again to see the weak winter sunlight filter through the season's natural cloud formations.

The experimental terraforming process was, for now, a very LIMITED success, with so many collateral damages and fatalities as to make it a totally phryric victory, nothing more.

With all the work and meticulous control needed by the artificial volcano finished, Lucas began programming some fully automated landscaping and urbanism plans into the orbital stations. He needed to create in advance the channel locks' harbors on each side, with all the secondary navigation canals, commercial loading berths and drydocks. This meant mapping the land & trenches, calculating the water level seasonal variances, and plotting naval traffic routes according to a standard size & shape of ship capable of navigating either the Great Lakes or the Atlantic ocean. Once the math was done, quick & dirty to get the process started today but finished cleanly another time, using the lasers like routers/lathes and the pulse beams like chisels/picks was much easier since there wasn't live lava spreading around, or the potential for an explosion at every second he worked.

The first job to do was totally automated to give the adolescent time to think on his detailed urbanism and hydrology plans. The orbital stations used the pulse cannons to shoot hundreds of strafing runs to break, flatten and pulverize every building, infrastructure, vehicle or terrain accident bigger than a small shopping cart. Then, after a half-hour cool-down period, the pulse cannons were set to shoot wide cone patterns to act as gigantic compactors to vaporize leftover loose debris, thus creating as close to perfectly flat ground before the complex land-carving occurred. This was necessary for Lucas to calculate the depth of the canals and docks, as well as establish the mean level the water
could reach at high tide in wet seasons.

Once all the preparatory stripping and leveling of the ground was done, the teen started on the side of Lake Erie. Lucas used the beam weapons to dig a vast empty 'U' shape that started about 500 yards away in the deep water area, going back towards the shore. The 1,000 yard wide open side of the 'U' was towards the lake's open waters, while the length of the shape was elongated enough that the curved part would be carved way inland, with the canal locks of the Great Eastern Split trench being the middle point of the curved bottom. This was the channel harbor for accessing the locks from the lake-side. A fully round shape of 2,000 yards diameter on the south side of the canal locks would serve as the channel harbor for the trench-side traffic.

The genial adolescent had decided to carve all the landscaping shapes down to a standard depth of 25 yards all over the design. This was plenty deep enough to ensure free-flow of both ships and waters all year long through seasonal changes, regardless of which side of the trench locks he was building. The other reason he had standardized the depth was that it would make the jobs of future municipal engineers a lot easier since they would have to calculate depth-pressure and current strength in the worst storm conditions just once for the entire system. This would speed-up the planning and conception of bridges, causeways, tide-breaker walls, extra dikes and possible subway tunnels under the waterways in the coming decades. Besides, even a fully loaded cargo barge or cruise ship wouldn't need that much depth to function safely, even in winter.

Once all the orbital beam weapons were done with their landscaping efforts, there were still a few occasional aftershocks that echoed through the region, but no one was left alive to hear them. Just like nobody was left to experience the incredible atmospheric warmth that was more fitting for the height of July than the depth of December at this parallel. Everywhere at fifty kilometers around the carcass of Toledo, the snows were melting, runoff streams were forming, and buildings were groaning from the sudden change in temperatures that caused dilation in the materials and joints of man-made structures. But there was nothing alive to witness it happening.

--- Restful interlude ---

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 20:39pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 17:39pm

After several hours of intense concentration and mental exertion, Lucas disconnected from the neural interface completely to give his aching mind a much needed rest. The damnable Copernicus stations were so far past obsolescence that what should have been a breeze to conceive and program with to-date systems had felt like an entire week-end of sloshing through the CIA's oldest, least maintained back-doors. Feeling worn out physically and mentally, the teenager glared malevolently at the adults that presently shared the room with him. If their kind had done their jobs right and kept the inhumane christian swine from being elected in the first place, none of this would have happened in their lifetimes. They wouldn't be getting any goodwill from him any time soon, he could promise you that!

And his ill-health certainly wasn't making him feel more amenable towards anybody, that too was evident by now.

Even though his idea had worked and the vast lake system's precious fresh soft waters were safe for the immediate future, this winter at least, Lucas Wolenczak wasn't celebrating anything. The solution was in every which way as bad as the problem it solved, and it created its own brand of disaster to deal with now. Not the least of which was the public revelation of what exactly the Copernicus orbital defense grid could truly accomplish, if directed by an able-minded planner.

Strangely enough, the adolescent didn't think that this would help him get rid of the Americans' desire to capture and imprison him for exploitation as a slave laborer. If anything, his success with
the spontaneous save-our-asses plan would only make him look all the more competent and productive, especially in the eyes of somebody like Shay Mosley or Mathilda Webber. He would need to be on guard for his safety, and have the lawyers make his presence in Canada legal before long, or it could get bad quickly if the beavers didn't lend their backing to his freedom.

Directing an even more aggressive gaze of doom towards his temporary underlings, the adolescent ordered them out of the entire suite and his life, on the immediateness of the moment, under pain of being the first human test targets for his new armament-cane. The noise of the capacitors charging and the sudden blue glow in the veinules that marbled the frame of the cane convinced all three that getting their teams back to Diefenbaker Airfield was the wiser course of action.

Barely one minute of conversation with the CSIS agents in the dining room had all three Americans leaving his suite, only one spy and two of Canada's new Beam-Guards mechanized infantry staying behind to keep him safe until the country's government decided what to 'try' next. He would need to keep an eye on that situation as well, in the coming hours.

Taking advantage of the segue point so helpfully supplied by the departure of the US agents from his living space, the young man went to the bathroom for a toilet break and a splash of soothing warm water on his face. After refreshing himself, he went to the kitchen to prepare a good hardy meal since he had eaten hardly anything since breakfast, due to the news of the atomic explosion being broadcast right on the lunch hour. After taking a little over an hour to eat his reheated leftovers and prepare a new pot of spiced holiday tea, he took the time to sip some warm liquid solace as he ate a piece of yule log cake while discussing the day's events with the CSIS agent. The man were making efforts at staying calm and polite, but it was clearly visible that he also suffered from frayed nerves and diminishing emotional stability. The passed week had truly been Hell on everybody all over the planet.

Eastern America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 22:06pm
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 19:06pm

Now that he was alone in his workroom again after his satisfying meal pause, with the doors securely locked, Lucas decided to keep off his meta-glasses to give his eyes and worn nerves a rest. Plunging deeply into the neuroplexic network while there were potentially hostile people around his body was never a pleasant experience. After doing it for close to ten hours today, he'd had his fill.

Shutting down all external or non-essential systems, the teen tasked the fabrication module with a series of small electronics parts to complement what had been produced during the preceding night. He needed those things done so he could complete certain small portable devices that would help insure his personal survival and freedom at the unavoidable moment when he would be alone against the world.

Once the machining was in full swing, he turned to the command hub, activating all three screens with displays that showed the planetary map with all his holdings, the registers that showed materials, vehicles and personnel, and the listing of who was responsible for management at each facility. It was time again for some household chores, most specifically the purview of how many workers' families had taken refuge in his lands when the call to assemble had been made. On top of this, they would now have complete strangers trying to be accepted inside the walled compounds as 'refugees of mercy' without offering him or his workers anything in return.

Well no.

He wouldn't accept that, and sent out messages to that effect. If he couldn't obtain refugee status in
Canada despite all the proof of Lawrence & Cynthia's depravities, and despite all the land holdings, businesses and sciences that he brought with him, then why the fuck should he care for the pain, misery and survival of others? Especially Americans? All these morons had let Trump and the cohort of church whores he conspired with steal the elections twice over, then stayed silent as he planned to transform the country into a pit of white worshipful trash. Why should he help them now? Because they asked? Because they think he'll be stupid enough to do it, like they were?

No. He would not.

The doors of his manors, manufactures and warehouses would stay closed unless the person asking had skills and competency matched by a solid, reliable personality that wouldn't turn on him like a rabid dog the moment a damned priest whistled for the mutts to assemble. There was no way in Hell's flames that Lucas would let anybody pull that sort of backstabbing con job on him or his workers ever again.

The teenager was so tired and worn out from his day that he spent only two hours on the management tasks for his businesses and contracts. Planning now implicated short, medium and long term military strategies with the afferent logistics chains. Oh, joy! What great tremulous joy that was! Not so much, not really, no. It was a basket-full of headaches and stresses that he could easily live without. By 21:00pm he left the workroom to go take a long soothing soak in a hot bath then ate a small meal composed yet again of reheated leftovers from the buffet cart of two days ago. After finishing his evening snack, he went to bed at around 23:00pm well intent on sleeping through the night. Pity the poor fool that woke him up early.

Necropsy of a dead city

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 01:53am
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 22:53pm
SeaQuest DSV
Ruins of the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland seaway, USA

Sailing through the tempestuous waters at the entryway of the ruined Chesapeake Bay, a large military convoy composed of ten surface ships and three submarines advanced in morose silence towards the mortal remains of the decimated national capital. The small fleet was composed of the principal flagship of the US Navy, the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, her usual quad of Arleigh-Burke destroyers, plus a pair of military cargo ships carrying construction equipments to build surveillance outposts and storm bunkers to begin emplacing permanent troops to maintain USA sovereignty despite the environmental damages and lack of population. The balance of the fleet was composed of the UEO flagship SeaQuest DSV 6000-B that played bodyguard for the brand new UEO submersible hospital ship Albrecht Kossel DSV 7500 fresh out of NCQ drydock. The last ship was a private contractor, piloting a venerable old LST-542-class tank landing ship that he had recycled to transport beach cleaning machinery to fight the yearly bloom of Red Tide in the bayous and shorelines of Florida. Now though, his ship carried back-hoes, forklifts, a telescoping crane, and two 10-wheel trucks carrying 3,500 gallon of potable water and diesel fuel, all to help in the building of the new territorial lighthouses / watch towers.

The convoy was sailing at half speed to avoid hitting debris that were floating in the wintry waters amongst the ice floes that were reforming, after having been melted spontaneously by the heat and
shock wave of the atomic blast. The floatsam was also caused by the blast, which had ripped materials and lifeforms off the ground and thrown it up, scattered to all winds carelessly. As the ships advanced in almost total silence, feeling like a funeral procession, they began to see pieces of burnt wood, flecks of drywall, sections of Tempo winter car shelters, shreds of asphalt roof shingles and, occasionally, pieces of human corpse that were barely recognizable because they were so small and mangled. Not that any of it would matter soon, with a snowfall having begun and the seaway's constant attempt to recreate it's thin sheen of whitish slush atop the waves.

Not that anything would be truly better than a brackish charcoal gray for several more days, not until all the ash, dust and pulverized debris that floated loosely atop the frigid waters had somehow sunk under the surface to dissolve throughout the zone. As it was, if it were daytime the sailors would see large swaths of inky black or turpid brown spread out like giant stains resting on the blue waters. The sailors in charge of sensor operations and coordinating the convoy's movements emitted a common opinion; it looked like a city had let loose thousands of tons of raw sewage in the bay, turning it into an open-air cesspit but without any smell but wintry ocean air.

1,000 feet deep under the falling snow and storm winds, Nathan Bridger was sighing in relief. He was already captain of the UEO's flagship, thus quite happy that the Nimitz's CO, admiral Geoffs, was officially in charge of the exploration convoy. Having just come out of a well earned retirement on an emergency call, Nathan hadn't had any time yet to familiarize himself with the new UEO structures, the leaders in place, or the policies the Treaty Cabinet maintained. In fact, since he had moved permanently to his private tropical island, he had pretty much ignored all politics because he was either drunk out of his mind, or trying to keep occupied to stay sober. Honestly, he'd been completely sober for the last three years, but functional amongst society only for about 20 months now. Given the situations at hand, personal and official, he was truly happy that Andrea Dre had given the lead chair to Geoffs rather than push it on him as some sort of 'welcome to the UEO service' gift that would poison his life.

Bridger was taking advantage of a quiet period of the day, sitting in one of the two plush couches in his official cabin on A-deck, reading the technical manual for the updated version of his boat. He had already spent three hours skimming the protocols' manual earlier, as they sailed from New Cape Quest, then stopping for a short meal and a cat nap, before plunging into the much more interesting reading material. Honestly, the new UEO protocols dedicated to the flagship were so numerous, densely packed and convoluted, that he suspected he would need to add a law degree to his portfolio in order to understand them enough to make half the decisions the ship required on a daily basis.

Andrea Dre's personal involvement in the writing of the manuals was quite clear, for those who knew her character and speech style. "Note to self", he thought glibly, "never let bureaucrats write technical booklets. They spend more time explaining the law suits you're dodging by following their instructions than why doing certain acts is actually dangerous or ill-advised". Meh! Who ever thought letting politos do the writing was any better clearly were drunker than he'd ever been in his life.

Sipping some nicely warm German black tea as he scanned through the schematics for the ship's brand new DSV rescue & manutentions deck, the veteran mariner couldn't help but be impressed by all the thought and assiduity to detail that had been given to the new section. Clearly, somebody wanted to be able to rescue injured divers, or damaged industrial robots, in deep oceanic chasms to go through all the trouble of building up the boat like this. Not that the dear old hull didn't deserve the upgrade, but Nathan's nose for bullshit was twitching mightily as he mentally imagined the money, man hours and thousands of tons of diverse expensive materials needed to make it all happen inside 2 years.

Unless he missed his educated guess quite badly, building a brand new submarine along his original
plans, while including the DSV recovery sections in it, would have come at only 10% more expensive than what he knew had been budgeted for the current build. The real factor it seemed was time. A brand new ship would have needed almost four years to craft the parts and assemble, while this method saw the whole design & rebuild finished inside 22-odd months. They even managed to add the fan-dangled new beam weapons, helicopter hangar, and quintuple the overall cybernetics capacity.

Not a bad deal, for the money spent, but as a naval architect/engineer, Nathan just couldn't let go of the feel that certain corners had in fact been cut round, rather than straight. Oh well, no use worrying about that yet. Unless they were going to war with anybody, those things he would have done differently wouldn't matter all that much.

Putting his porcelain cup down on the side-table in favor of taking an old fashioned Bear Paw molasses cookie, just like his late wife Carol enjoyed so much, the elderly sailor could feel pain and sorrow ache deep in his bones with every movement. He was for all purposes a 'broken' soldier. His government had first been corrupted – disnatured – by a foolish buffoon who was the laughingstock of the planet's political ruling class. Then, the geriatric megalomaniac had turned their homeland into a religious tyranny, with said theocracy immediately collapsing on the moment it was unveiled to the people. The entire country descended into war, chaos and self-annihilation at such break-neck speeds that nobody could have predicted the roll of events. Then the Papal Fool was killed off, but his successor was such a submissive, emotionally co-dependent, feckless cocksucker that he preferred to destroy what was left rather than publicly accept the failure of his defeated coup d'état against democracy and humanity. Thus, the leaderless minion went so nuts that he nucleated the Capital, wiping out almost an eighth of the country's inhabitable landmass, incinerating or pulping close to forty million humans in one unforeseen decimating blast wave.

And so here they were; a baleful funeral procession of a dozen ships, 7 atop the surface and 3 below the waves, heading to the graveside of a dead city that wasn't really finished dying, as an empty gesture towards a nation that didn't even have enough living citizens left for it to mean anything.

Wasn't that a thrill.

The lifeforms in the 400 or so kilometers around Washington DC were well and truly dead to this world, but the climate wasn't finished throwing out hurricanes, storm clouds that belched acidic rain for hours, and occasional coruscating plasma discharges that lit up the ink-black night sky. Even though the ship was quite safely cruising at 1,000 feet below surface, they had cybernetic links to the regular ships above them, plus they had deployed their drag-line antenna which was floating just barely above the waterline, giving them color visual, thermal imagery, echo-imagery, magnetometry, radiometry, and a comms relay that included cell & satellite signals, CB and IR-laser. They had a very good idea of what was happening above them, without really needing the other ships to send them scans or data. Not that they wanted to see all this bloody crap all that much.

Sigh... No, Washington DC wasn't finished dying, not any time soon. And they would all be stuck with that inhumane view for weeks, maybe months, as they did the analyses and built the preliminary structures to house the weather scanners, navigational beacons, comms relays and personnel habitats to maintain a few troops to watch the zone. Given how far away and apart from each other these bunkered habitats would be, watching and sending out warning calls was pretty much all they would be doing for several years to come.

Sighing deeply in despondency, Nathan closed his tired eyes as he chewed his sweet cookie, thinking back to happier times, when his worse worry in life was to make certain he had enough sweet treats in the pantry to keep the peace between Carol and Robert, as their son was a sugar bug. Given how fast his mother could grind her way through a pack of Oreo's, Bear Paws, Peanut butter
cookies or puffed rice & marshmallow squares, it didn't take a genius to see the boy had gotten that habit honestly, even if not from his father's side. The fights they'd had over who got the last piece in a pack... Somebody should have gotten a medal from those epic wars. Most likely himself, considering how often he wound up as the poor civilian collateral damage in those vicious fights. Whoever tells you that sugar isn't an addictive as bad as tobacco, alcohol or weed is lying to your face; he could bear witness to it.

Frowning wearily, eyes still closed, as he ate his late-night snack, the old man thought of the tens of millions of people who had died in the last four days, wondering if any of them actually understood what had happened to their nation, or if they had just tried to blindly outrun the catastrophe as it unfolded. Bridger wondered silently what he would have done, if he had been caught aground, on the US mainland, when that week of insanity began to expose itself on TV. He was about to take another bite when a crunching noise from his left side made him blink a few times to get his eyes back in line to scan around the room to find the source of the errant sound.

The holo-emitter console was active. Inside the silvery mist he could see the bust of the 13 year old kid who had made the device, moving and making noise like a real person would. He was apparently chewing something rather noisily while holding a large metal thermal tankard with both hands against his chest, as if to get warmed by the hot contents. Nathan blinked as the kid seemed to have a paperback book floating in the cyber-ether in front of him, the phantom pages turning by themselves occasionally.

Whaaaaat?

"Ahem... Can I help you with something?" the captain asked aloud, still quite perplexed by the weird intrusion on his quiet reading time. They would soon reach the site of their former Capital city and he would be needed on the bridge, no excuses possible even if he would essentially be useless while the analyses were being carried out. He needed all the alone time he could get to gather the fortitude to face the hard night ahead of their convoy into the newly named 'American Shattered Lands'.

The youthful teenager in the image turned a jaded face towards the old man, giving him a cold, distant look that Nathan had trouble understanding, especially since this was a machine, not a real living person. How was it that he could display emotional façades like this, and what did it mean in terms of system activity behind it?

"Yes?" came the chill response. "Can't you see that I'm reading? Do I bother you when you are concentrating on your own hobbies? And people say that kids are impolite these days. We obviously learned that from your generation, didn't we?" snarked the virtual child, with venomous wit aplenty.

Scoffing aloud, the veteran sailor was actually amused as that particular reply had been sent his way by both his son and his brother's kids on many occasions. As a primary school teacher, Carol had heard it quite a few times every week. And the kids were right about it too, most times.

"I was wondering why you were online. I don't recall activating the console. And I do believe that a beeper would have sounded if the emitter was forced-activated remotely by the bridge or engineering to do a systems check. So. Why are you here?"

Honestly, the old man felt weird at having what amounted to a dialogue with a hologram that was nothing but the representation of a person frozen in time inside databanks. However, he was also weary of possible malfunctions and hackers jogging around his wires that could accidentally trigger complex systems like the holo-counselor program. If he were lucky, the program could tell him directly the cause of the situation, then maybe even fix it automatically. In worse case, he would call the bridge to report the malfunction for repair. They were still in the ship's shakedown period, fresh out of drydock, therefore some little errors were expected.
Despite the instinctual jolt of dread he had felt at remembering the rebellious computer 'HAL' from the old movie of his youth 'Space Odyssey' when he saw the imager alight, Nathan wasn't in a mood to panic just yet. The system had been active for three years by now, and had actually been used as 'central helper' during the design and construction of the ship's new iteration. Andrea Dre had been quite smitten by the virtual boy, and even the ornery Oliver Hudson had grumbled about it being "not too bothersome, despite some odd little quirks". The crew hadn't yet made any comments about the program, but then again he had spent most of his time aboard in formal meetings or reading the damned manuals, not loitering around socializing with sailors.

The silvery ghost-in-the-machine moved a hand to his mouth, thusly showing it was large twisted pretzels he was munching on as he read. A slow gulp of liquid from the mug had a small cloud of steam waft around the boy's chin, wrapping his lower face in thin wisps of whitish vapors. The young eyes were panning right-to-left at a pace Nathan was hard pressed to follow; he couldn't imagine a real human being able to read and absorb texts that fast. As the hologram took its time to answer, Bridger silently marveled at the level of detail and quality of animation that went into the programming of the system. Having participated in the design and creation of the SeaQuest's first variant DSV protocols with all the assorted sensors, dials, gauges and data displays that it entailed, he could envision a pretty good idea of just how much genius, imagination, work time and hard efforts had been whelmed to produce what he saw.

"You do know it's not polite to stare, don't you?" quipped the hologram as he kept his eyes and focus on his phantom book, making Bridger wonder if it was an actual function in the system or a subroutine that got stuck like an old fashion vinyl record that stayed in the same track.

"I know. I just find you intriguing. And amazing. Sometimes amusing, too." the veteran sailor answered lightly, as he closed his technical booklet to focus on what was shaping up to become a conversation partner that he hadn’t expected to find aboard.

"Wow... You really have no life whatsoever to have that many feelings about me." the program responded with clear sarcasm. "I'm not even real, afterall. Why don't you put on a movie or video game? It would wake you up for your upcoming mandatory bridge presence much more thoroughly than my charming personality ever will."

Nathan snorted at the thinly veiled suggestion to 'take a hike' the computerized persona had given him. His son had been pretty much the same at that age, but mostly when he was concentrating on a video game that he was rushing to beat the level he was stuck on. Reading paper books had never been his son's favorite pastime. The few research reports he had done for school had been based on texts that he could find digitally on the Internex, despite all the efforts Carol and he had made to change that bad habit to balk at physical paper books.

Concentrating back on the imager, Nathan replied "No thank you. I tend to fall asleep on movies, these days. Especially since there's nothing new anymore, just damned sequels and remakes. As for video games, that was never my way of passing time anyways. I did try my hand at Sim City, back when the first versions were okay, but ever since the fourth and fifth came out, all I could do was gripe at the bugs and illogical manner of how the town revenues were gathered. Or the zoning tools; those had some nasty problems in them. The roadway builder was worse. But the inability to make money in a reliable, stable fashion, with the tax basin collapsing every few years the game clock passed, that's what made me quite the game. Sheer frustration at the ineptitude of the programmers that obviously had no knowledge of urbanism or city management despite that was the goal of the entire thing. And you? What are you reading that's got you so bent on making me silent?"

Humming softly at the older man's answer, the virtual boy replied tonelessly "It's an old treatise on alchemy from Hungary, written in Hebrew, from the beginning of the Dark Age of Humanity, Circa
1200 or so. I am reading it as part of my general culture, and specifically to learn about the diverse roots of what is now called Modern Medicine across most of the Earth. I guess you could say it's a slow night, given that I'm not hacking anything military, or trying to rebuild somebody's neuro-chemical equilibrium based solely on the lab tests ordered by their fifth-rate medic."

Nathan blinked both eyes slowly in surprise at the detailed answer he got from the emitter. Then he concentrated on the actual information, being surprised by the subject the program was processing and the reason he did it. Suddenly, the older man had a pressing question to ask. "Tell me something; are you actually reading a copy of the genuine text, or did you download a version of it and this is just the imagery the system projects to show that it's working on it?" The sailor got up from his couch to go stand besides the holo-emitter, to watch closely the reactions of the virtual child as the program answered his query.

The silvery boy chewed on another pretzel, followed that with some steaming coffee, then looked from his floating book to Bridger's face, as if he were truly in the room with the human, having a real conversation with him. Wearing an unreadable expression on his translucent features, the ghost child replied in monotone words "Would it make any difference to your life or command of the ship? What does it matter how I learn things? Or what the subjects are? Tell me, captain, are you truly so insecure in your status as CO of the boat that the mere image of a child suffices to unsettle you?"

Nathan looked straight into the eyes of the silver-white-blue gas image, wondering wearily about just how much intellect and self-awareness the thing had been created with. These were not the answers of a simple holo-assistant like 'Alexa' or 'Cortana'. No; these were the reactions of an actual person who was getting defensive at what they perceived to be an offensive comment towards their mind and professional standing. Bridger was about to ask a follow-up question to probe the program's reactions deeper when the buzzer on his door sounded. The phantom teen made a show of manually closing his book, packing his pretzel bag and turning around to – seemingly – walk away into the distance, thus making his image shrink until it was half-sized, then vanished completely.

Blinking rapidly in deep thought, Nathan growled at the damned buzzer again interrupting his train of thoughts with its shrill demands for attention. "Come in, damn it! And stop that infernal racket! I'm trying to think in here!" he yelled out over his shoulder, before concentrating on the holo-emitter that was, for all appearances, still active even though the gas module was inert and no images were showing anymore.

Chief of security Manilow Crocker came inside the cabin, standing just by the entry door, holding a metal clipboard against his ample girth with both arms folded over it. "Ah, Nate... I thought you'd want to go to the bridge about now. We're closing in on DC's old place, and the conn officer called the survey crews to their stations."

Frowning interrogatively, with his lips pursed in disapproval at being removed from what he considered an important situation to understand, Nathan nodded sharply once then walked over to his desk to retrieve the keys, cards and his PAL unit from the charging block. Once equipped, both older men walked out of the cabin, locked the door tightly, and made their way to the command deck to oversee the autopsy of the dead Capital.

Inside the cabin, the holo-emitter densified its gas bubble until the imagery inside was able to reach 35% material solidity. The ghost of the 13 year old boy appeared again, the same book floating in the silvery ether before him as he foraged through a packet of chocolate & mint cream wafer cookies this time around. Looking around the empty cabin, the phantom boy sent a silent cybernetic command for the lights to lower down to half intensity so his book could be more visible. Adopting what looked from outside to be a comfortable reclining position with his large thermal mug of coffee held preciously over his heart with both hands, the silver-blue child spoke softly to himself, his thin reedy
voice carrying weakly across the cabin. "Alone and peaceful at last." the sad words whispered. "Maybe I'll get to finish this text today and move on to another for tonight. It's interesting but not much use beyond historical perspective. I really need to find something more actual to occupy myself with, so I don't go daft like my parents." the soft melancholy words echoed hollowly in the empty room.

His face showing how deeply depressed he was, the phantom child gazed despondently towards the viewport in the outer hull that was placed near his console. Sighing in deep emotional pain, the synthetic adolescent asked in soft melancholy tones: "If a hologram of a human cries alone in an empty room, is it really a person who is truly suffering?" Thin lines of whitish gas formed in his eyes, trickling slowly down his face to disappear back into ether before they reached his chin. The digital youth was so lost in his thoughts and emotions that he didn't realize he was exteriorizing his feelings.

It didn't matter anyways. No one heard him, so no one answered.

For some reason, he was certain that no one would have given him any response anyways, other than turning-off the console to keep him from pestering them with questions about his existence and person-hood. Humans were notoriously bad at dealing with their own emotions and mental stability; why would they be capable or caring enough to help with his ailing soul?

He really hoped his brother called him soon. It had been a month since they had last spoken, and he missed having at least one organic in his life who treated him like he mattered as a person rather than just an expensive video game. Unfortunately, he was well aware of the depth of trouble his creator was drowning in; the chances of a social call anytime soon were slim, if at all. As with everything else in both their poor maligned lives, he would have to be patient and wait in silence, alone and forgotten, just as they both always were.

{ SQ } --- { Here rots in pieces the late WDC } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 02:11am
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 23:11pm

Commander Jonathan Ford was standing with his back to the four helm chairs as he spoke to lieutenant-commander Hitchcock who was sitting at her station, overseeing the deployment of the Sea Crabs and Hyper-Reality Probe for the sample collection phase of their post mortem analysis. She was busy calibrating the HRP headset while the probe did a fully automated launch from its holding bay through a dedicated tube that usually served for it, the WSKRS or putting out navigational assistance buoys when exploring around hazardous coastlines, shoals, and distressed or wrecked ships.

Ford saw over Hitchcock's head as the massive armored clamshell doors on the bridge's right-side entry opened to let in the captain and chief of security. Bridger seemed upset - or just worried? - about something since he wasn't paying much attention to the prattle coming from his old academy friend as they walked. Oh, great! An upset CO was just what the ship needed at this time.

"Commander Ford, how far along are we in the deployment schedule?" the older mariner asked curtly as he sat in the large thickly padded command 'throne', thus displacing the poor lieutenant that had held conn until that point. The younger officer scrambled to get out of the veteran's way as he could easily perceive that something had soured the elder's mood before he came to supervise operations. Given that they were investigating the remains of their home country's capital city, everybody hoped it was simply sadness or anger at people he knew that died in the city and not something wrong with the newly rebuilt boat, or worse, the crewmen themselves.

Standing on his spot as it was more useful because he could see either the helm stations or Cathy's
console from where he was, the 33 year old answered in carefully moderated tones. "We have run the newly reshaped entry of the Chesapeake Bay and are presently moving forward along the Potomac River's remodeled inlet at one sixth our best speed, roughly 15 knots, at 1,000 feet under but raising to 500 slowly. The Nimitz group, Kossel and LST have matched our speed but assumed positions about one kilometer behind us so we can send them the sea-floor & currents map updates before they proceed up river."

The captain nodded, replying in a more mellow voice "Thank you commander. Have the helmsmen reported any odd current patterns or turbulence during our entry into Chesapeake Bay? Were there any more seismic shocks reported by the mainland?" The senior officer was asking as he closed the pivoting eaves of the split-table over himself, plugged his PAL into the socket and typed in his PIN to switch the displays over to those he preferred when doing a full shift on active watch.

Ford replied a bit more easily now "No to either, sir. We have two pilots here that did mini-sub patrol duty out of Alexandria for the DC anti-terrorism squad, about four years back." The black skinned man pointed at two sailors leaning over the left-side navigation table, doing comparative analysis between the old maps and new readouts.

"They know most of the Potomac's bed, walls and shores, all the way up north to the old Seneca Creek's defunct locks, and up the Anacostia all the way north to the split between west & east branches. We also have a team of 8 scuba divers who were in the same service, tasked specifically to inspect bridge pilings and infrastructure pipes for sabotage or intrusion. Most were in Florida due to career moves in the last few years, but one was taking his vacation time for Christmas in Miami with his wife and kids, when everything happened. The UEO have issued a call-back for all personnel who are qualified scuba divers and DVS workers, but given the fact the USA is undergoing 5 different wars of religion, race, gender, age and professional standings... Well, the UEO navy's personnel office wasn't very optimistic about getting return calls to their public appeal."

Humming softly, Bridger nodded absently as he finished connecting with and setting up his station. God, but that was taking time! It was only something like four minutes, but what a bother it could be when you're stressed out and waiting for even more bad news. On the plus side, the new command dais gave him a myriad of displays, information and tactical options about as fast as he could perceive and intellectualize them. On the negative side, he couldn't simply walk in and sit in the chair as he spoke to his people anymore. The captaincy console, bridge management system, and even the ship's main network overwatch programs, all demanded a sign-in with PIN and password, plus the fact that now he had to tick the check boxes next to several alerts on the pop-up 'command & control warning' for the conn officer who was taking up the new shift.

The entire system was good, well balanced and thoughtfully set-up, but it added at least two layers of cybernetic administrative maneuverings each time any officer sat in the chair as the official 'conn' or 'officer of the watch'. The obvious benefit was that if an officer ticked a problem in the column that said he was pushing it forward to the next man to hold conn, he had to select or write in manually the reason for why the problem wasn't solved under his tenure. Some situations like engine or hull repairs that needed multiple days/weeks automatically offered the 'work in progress' response with the 'on schedule' or 'delays encountered' options to qualify the state of things. Smaller things though, needed to be justified if they were delayed unto later. The system of self-writing automated reports would need a bit of habit forming, but Nathan could predict that it would be quite helpful, once he was used to it. This was a better solution than handwriting everything on four-ply carbon paper, that was sure. The logic tree that selected and presented the fast-fill options & replies had certainly been conceived by somebody that worked in heavy industrial infrastructures or large-hull vehicles, he could tell that much at this point.

One last tick, swipe the touchscreen for a few quick scans of what was happening all over the boat,
and Bridger could now get out of the constrictive chair assembly to walk around his domain without
two dozen different alarms going off all at once. Apparently, for the captain to leave his appointed
chair without justifiable reason or inputting several passwords was cause to think he was sick, remiss
in his duties, or being threatened to act contrary to protocols. Passing a weary hand over his
forehead, the old mariner wondered just how dense, and deep, that surveillance net went. Well, the
only way to truly know that was to live aboard for a few months and figure it out as he went.

"Commander Hitchcock, how's your baby doing?" Nathan asked in his normal on-duty voice as he
walked to stand besides the young woman who had almost become his daughter-in-law, ten years
ago.

Her eye movements were partially hidden behind the blue tinted lenses of the HRP as she slowly
looked up to the older man, neither detached nor welcoming. Back when she dated Robert and they
had very briefly talked about getting engaged, she had never been particularly close to either Nathan
nor Carol Bridger. That had been just eight months before her whirlwind relationship and eventual
short, ill-fated marriage to Benjamin Krieg, which situation was weird as heck since the man was
serving aboard ship as chief quartermaster. In all, it meant Cathy had neither good nor bad
experiences with Bridger, and no emotional baggage to react on. He was her CO and she knew
barely a tick more than his publicly declared service records, no more. Ben on the other hand, had
accompanied Robert back home a few times during shared leave periods from the academy and their
first deployment, so he had met the elder Bridger's at the time. She had no idea how the captain was
feeling about having so many people who knew his son serving aboard, and didn't feel inclined to
pry into the life of what was essentially a stranger from her perspective.

Clearing her throat, Hitchcock answered glumly "It's bad out there, sir. The HRP is performing just
as it should and all systems are green, but only for now. I think we are facing a lot of maintenance
work on all our dependent craft and probes when they come back in, sir. The ocean water in
Chesapeake Bay is like a soup full of micro debris and the river water is already showing almost
twice that much before we even enter the inlet proper. Since all our boats and crafts use encased
aqua-jets to propel themselves, we are going to have to double up on the time and resources to open
the coffers then pressure wash the gunk off the mobile parts of the turbines. Not to mention that,
unlike the classic free-spinning propellers of the surface ships, the turbines in the aqua-jets can
actually clog up so bad that they stop pushing out water and burn out their engines from straining
against the obstructed pipes. Beyond that specific situation, everything else is mostly the kinds of
slightly elevated temperatures, shallow background radiation and densified viscosity that NATO
scientists predicted would follow a nuclear blast in near-ocean conditions around DC. The cold
winter climate is also making the water bodies denser, heavier and slower to react, even at DSV
ranges."

Ford snorted aloud in disdain at that last part. "The damned models from the 1980's didn't predict the
multiple landmasses splitting off from the main continent, or the brand new trench cutting through the
eastern seaboard like a cheap wedding cake from COSTCO's frozen pastry aisle. That they got
anything right about the situation... Well... I honestly don't know if it's reassuring or a sign nobody
really knows anything about this mess."

Nathan gestured vaguely with his left hand as he contemplated the sea-floor map and colored data
points displayed on Cathy's console. "Both options can coexist, commander. I don't think anybody
 sane ever envisioned an explosion like this one, but the fact that some of the basic predictions in the
models happened as foreseen can help assuage our worries about the rest that wasn't. Anything else,
we'll have deal with as it is presented to us."

Helmsman number 2 called out angrily "What in Sam's Hill is that clusterfuck doing in my water?
Sensors, can you tell me what I'm seeing out there? Cuz it don't look like a dead whale carcass like
I've ever seen in seven years o' piloting anything!"

Sensor chief Miguel Ortiz toggled the forward vari-cam array to pivot 9.88 degrees left to zoom in on the offending object, only to choke off his remark halfway out of his mouth. On the main viewscreen the bridge crew could see a close-up of the bent, crooked foreign mass as it drifted haphazardly along the undertow currents of the river towards the wide open sea. Despite being almost 45 feet long if it were straight, the thick twisted object was remaining at mid-depth by unknown reasons since the sensors indicated it was mostly metal and plastic.

"Fuck it to Hell and back" Migs swore crassly. "It's a bus. It's a bloody municipal bus that got blown right off the landmass by the blast wave and floated downstream drowned at half-way. What the heck is that thing doing floating around like that?"

Ignoring the verbal emoting of his crewmen since it was a normal healthy reaction to seeing atrocity in person without disturbing their job performance, Bridger leaned over Cathy a bit more to tap some buttons on the touchscreen to initiate a second pass of analytics on the wrecked object. The answer was obvious; the bus was one of those brand new hybrid electric models, composed mostly of synthetic plastics, kevlar weave insulation pads, reinforced fuel tanks and no-flat tires filled with a plastic honeycomb structure that actually made them quite buoyant. The entire thing would have sunk if it had been fresh off the assembly line, but not in this state with the roof mounted battery and air conditioner exploded right off the carriage, the cabin mostly torn to shreds in the event.

Nathan frowned grimly, his lips a thin white line in his pinched features. "It looks as if the bus was circulating normally when the detonation happened. The blast was near enough that the lithium-ion battery reacted badly, causing a secondary explosion just as the vehicle was being shoved out to the river depths. The rest of the frame and carriage are light magnesium and plastics, nothing that sinks without help. Devoid of the massive roof unit, the main assembly is just drifting around, until it loses momentum. Then it will fall to the bottom, like every other dead thing in the sea."

Ford made a face but no comments. Nodding at his boss, the ship's Ex-O tapped Hitchcock's console then made hand signs at her, to which she nodded in reply. Now actively ignoring the bridge and people around her, she delved cybernetically into the Hyper-reality Probe as if it were a thick scuba-suit for a DSV maneuver. It was a good thing she was actually qualified for apnea diving, scuba diving and nitr/ox diving in DSV hard suits; all of those skills came in handy to pilot and interact with the large heavy probe that she had helped to create two years ago at the UEO Navy labs of New Cape Quest.

Lieutenant Timothy O'Neil, ship's chief of communications & signals, raised a hand to get the senior officers' attention. "Sirs! Incoming conference call from NCQ, requesting all ship CO's on-line, madam secretary general Dre is waiting for the line. There will also be Shay Mosley, director of NCIS for the USA, and Mathilda Webber, director of DXS for the USA, joining the vid-meet."

{ SQ } --- { Video conference begins } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 02:30am
Western America; Monday 21st of December, 2020; 23:30pm (midnight)

Making faces of annoyance, the two senior officers not encased in a VR set gestured at the man to accept the line on the main monitor in mosaic setup. It only took seconds for Andrea Dre to appear, seated in one of the large plush couches of her office in the UEO Treaty HQ. Sitting besides her were admiral William Noyce who had been disembarked in Florida before sailing for DC's remains, another admiral but from the UEO - JAG branch, and a mousy type in a brown suit that practically
had 'academics professor' stamped on his forehead because of how stereotypical his attire and behavior were.

In the central bottom portion of the monitor were the two images of the US agency directors, each in the OPS rooms of their respective HQ.

On the other small rectangles of the monitor were the heads of each ship in the convoy, including one in the bottom right corner that was highlighted by a glowing white frame to indicate that this image was their own ship’s broadcast so the officers would have an external perspective on themselves during the conference. Sometimes, seeing oneself acting out like an imbecile could calm down tempers before career ending idiocies could be spoken out for the whole world to see.

Point in case; Trump appearing on Fox & Friends at noon on a weekend day.

In order to avoid such deplorable spectacles, the UEO Alliance had established a policy that on all vid-phone calls, singles or conferences, there would always be a small mortise of your own broadcast in your screen so you could see yourself, thus evaluate and moderate your own demonstrations accordingly. This also meant that in the diverse law enforcement, military, and bureaucratic branches, absolutely no leeway or mercy was ever given to those proffering threats or obscene gestures at a superior or investigator. This insured civilized, professional discourse and interactions at all levels, in all services, or swift retaliation came to the offender regardless of rank or status.

Andrea Dre began immediately once all participants had confirmed a functioning signal.

"Gentlemen, I am calling you to inform you that a classified briefing package has been sent to your command servers on each ship. This concerns the recent and still ongoing activities by the space stations of the Copernicus defensive array. Young doctor Wolenczak has managed to use three of the weapons platforms to secure the 'joint' of the Great Eastern Split at the shores of Lake Erie to protect the fresh water supply of north-east America and Canada. The particulars of the event and processes used are classified, not to be shared outside the relevant clearance holders or command-level senior ranks. Am I clear on this?" she explained tersely in a voice that was clearly aggressive. After the long day and half-night she'd lived through, you could understand that she was on the end of her rope, and her temper was considerably frayed at this point.

All ship commanders acknowledged positively her instructions before she continued. Passing a weary, shaking hand through her long blond hair, the middle-aged woman made an effort to finish this so she could go eat and sleep a few hours before morning came.

"Alright, people. We have a situation developing that needs resolution before it gets bad, then worse. As you are all already aware, it was young doctor Lucas Wolenczak who committed the financial destruction of all churches, sects, cults and their varied ecclesiastes who were registered in the fiscal or police dossiers of the planet's active governments. This is presently causing a tidal wave of destitution, misery, discontent and civil unrest in nation after nation as the populations are becoming aware of just how far reaching the cybernetic attack truly is. The problem is that we quite clearly need the good doctor alive and healthy to help us with the rebuilding effort across the planet. Not only do his companies still produce foodstuffs, medicines and computers, but also weapons & munitions in two distinct facilities on the Canada – USA border, at Sault-Sainte-Marie and Sarnia. There are rumors, coming from several old CIA operatives we have managed to hire as they fled, about his other emplacements in Detroit and Buffalo."

Taking a few seconds to let that sink in, Andrea then continued in the same tone "On top of this, the young man is a superlative medical practitioner, a potent biochemist and pharmacologist, and one of the best cybernetologists alive at present. In short, given that we expect to have lost close to 200 million people in the USA alone by the end of March 2021, and almost 900 million in the rest of the
planet from the oncoming religious and civil unrest from the faith-industry crash, plus the starvation and diseases as people will be too poor to buy anything... Well, we can't afford to lose high caliber people like him anymore, not unless he's a proven threat against us. Given that he has just saved millions of lives by protecting the St-Lawrence River's fresh water basin from either contamination or depletion, the UEO Council has signified to me that they aren't inclined to declare him an enemy yet."

Admiral Geoffs grunted amusedly at his superior's roundabout way of speaking. "Whad'da ya want with us, then? The planet's burning, we have better things to do than gabbing the night away."

Scowling fiercely at the impolite interruption of her well prepared speech by the hulking ruffian in the beige shirt, SG Dre answered firmly "A medically capable ship, but secured enough to protect the young genius from would-be assailants and saboteurs. He has critical injuries, infections to his legs, that he was scheduled to have examined during the Christmas holidays, but that plan is rather obviously scuppered, in light of multiple wars, nuclear fallout, and assassins running around willy-nilly."

Geoffs pointed at his colleague in the mosaic of faces, saying "This ain't even a question! That there is a hospital ship with 400 beds for convalescent patients in a hundred 4-bed suites, including 40 separate quarantine rooms with single bed. Why are you having a conference with all of us when the Kossel can pick up the kid on its own as easily as any other patient? Their crew's not inept, last I saw of them. Get the canucks to send the kid over by jet-copter or Chinook as soon as the first outpost is activated, the Kossel's team will do the rest on arrival. Why are we involved in this? Speaking of which, why aren't the Canadians online for this meet? Or the kid? I'm pretty sure this concerns them more than us."

"The UEO Council is not certain that the Canadian government is not compromised by regional branches of American churches or sects. Therefore, they want to try and manage this – affectation – without the possibility of sabotage by the cousins of defeated clerics seeking vengeance for their dead relatives or their burnt churches. I disagree with the position, but I have many limits to how much leeway I am allowed in executive actions that don't come with a written warrant from the Council. Similarly, several confederation leaders are presently displeased to see a child with so much money, lands, and power, acting without a 'venerable mentor' to hold his wealth in trust until he has reached adult age. Again, this is clearly a transparent ploy to lay hands on said wealth to steal it or enslave the child in a felonious 'master – servant' type of contract or bond, and I have spoken out against it."

Making a face of disgust as she remembered several of the arguments made by the Himalayan, Pan-Arabic and Pan-African alliances. A few discrete comments issued on secured channels by the European Union delegate hadn't been models of humane tolerance either. Corruption and depravity came in all sizes and shapes, and seemed to congregate in politics, when organized religion wasn't available to use as a cloak to shield themselves from the public eye.

"It's the basic security level for the containment array required by the asset that is forcing us to contemplate such elaborate measures to house and transport him." answered Noyce glibly. "The young man is exceedingly intelligent, inventive, innovative, performant, but has also become aggressive, paranoid (rightly so) quite liberally violent, and has demonstrated publicly a tendency towards using area-effect weapons that can remold entire continents. His use of anti-population cyber attacks directly against the beating heart of humanity, the electronic banks, has also proven that he is passed beyond giving much of a damn about consequences to the world, the people, or even himself. Unfortunately, all that means that only a specific type of personnel can interact with him successfully over a prolonged period without triggering a calamity-inducing reflex on his part. Then you add the number of governments and private groups that want to get hold of him to control his fortune,
companies, especially his sciences, and the choke-hold he can exert on the banking networks... It means he also needs protection layers; several of them, spread out around like onion skins wrapped around his person, his workshops, his conglomerate, and so on."

The female captain of the submersible hospital ship shook her head negatively on hearing that list of problems and criteria for safety and successful relationship to the patient. "No can do, madam Dre. The Albrecht Kossel was designed for mass-casualty treatment & transport to the nearest mainland base, not serving as a motorized fortress for some not-controlled-at-all super genius with a constant stream of enemies, lobbyists and foreign diplomats after his hide. Not to mention, we ain't no research lab, and certainly not a manufacturing plant for heavy stuff like this kid makes."

Andrea Dre blew air out of her mouth in exasperation, signaling with her right hand for the officers on screen to shut it while she explained her idea. "I am well aware of the limitations in design and function of each ship in that convoy, including the single private contractor present. My idea was to permanently lodge doctor Wolenczak aboard the SeaQuest since some of the ship's computer network is already compatible with his tech, because he helped us to design it three years ago. From there, he could get his treatments in the boat's infirmary, or shuttle over to the Kossel for specialist medics and equipment when necessary. Likewise, if any ship in the convoy needs the young prodigy's special brand of attention, he could just move from hull to hull to fix problems or design the innovations required by whatever you encounter during your shared mission, then email it via las-com."

Nathan snorted, not amused at the poisonous gift he was being force-fed. Right from the beginning of the mission he had guessed that it would become something like this arrangement, but he had expected to have more time to get used to his boat, crew, and being back amongst people. Not to mention that admiral Geoffs was perfectly correct; there was no way that kid would accept this without being a fully active participant in the decisional process. This would not go well. Not at all.

Clearing his throat noisily to get the SG's attention, captain Bridger asked aloud "Did you ask the young man his opinion before making a decision like this? Because I really don't think this will go over well with him, especially if you try to impose it. If anything, you might want to anticipate a violent reaction on his part, if you try to even just propose it, let alone impose the decision on him."

Scowling worse now, Andrea Dre queried nastily "And what do you base your view of that on, Nathan? You haven't even been back in society for more than a week and never met the kid, so how can you think you know how he would react?"

His voice taking on a much harder tone, the older sailor replied toxically "Because I opened my eyes to reality before I made a judgment call on the situation! Look at Noyce sitting next to you, and ask him! Which boat did Lawrence Wolenczak try to have his teenaged son imprisoned, enslaved, tortured and murdered aboard of? Which boat did Lawrence already have paid minions aboard, ready to enact his fell will the moment the boy set foot on deck? Can you even give guarantees that all the perpetrators and conspirators were found and neutralized? What about white supremacists and Trumpists? Are there any left aboard? These maniacs wanted to kill the kid because of his race, age, ancestral religion, and the multiple medical formations he has. Can you certify that all of the criminals have been found and removed from the ship? I certainly can't do that! I've been in command less than 48 hours, and the civil war has been in full swing for grossly that too. What the Hell kinds of guarantees can you give this kid to convince him to move, or follow your demands, without retaliation?"

Taking a breath to calm himself, Nathan signaled he wasn't finished yet. "Let us not forget that he is already a major supplier of services and material goods for the UEO, Canada and the USA. If you try to simply command him to move and produce on demand without any kind of payment or
compensation, every company, manufacture, hospital and service center in the Alliance will panic, starting a workers' and employers' revolutionary movement against your Cabinet. Forcible nationalization and 'imperial' styled dictatorial commandments over private companies & properties have NEVER been tolerated inside the liberal democracies of the Western societies. If you want something from this kid, you will have to ask if he's available, then negotiate terms and sign a contract with payment in hand, or else find another solution. I can foresee clearly violence and area-effect reprisals if you try to force him to bend to your will due to shortsightedness, or worse, simple ageist bigotry."

The man seated on Dre's left spoke up at this point. He was Admiral Gunther Garver, the chief of the UEO Judge Advocate General services, loaned from the German equivalent. "I must point out, Madame Secretary, that we have been over this point already in previous meetings. The UEO charter forbids all forms of enslavement, forced labor camps, chain gangs, or any attempt to extort uncompensated labor or work-product from the citizens or permanent residents of our members. A following article of the charter applies these very same forbiddances & protections to tourists, migrants and refugee status claimants. All the possible sorts of exemptions or derogations to these articles such as minority age, mental capacity deficits, abusive claims by parents, or the spurious demands of religious groups to operate 'reformation camps for dispirited youth' have all been entered into the charter and declared illegal from the onset. Even the IPT couldn't change that, or rule differently, not even for Wolenczak."

William Noyce huffed loudly, growling at the stupidity of – some – people involved in the matter. "Could you please get it through your thick skulls that you can't legally force this kid against his will and move on to a real solution? We have all the tools to negotiate with him, let's just hammer out a more extensive service & supply contract, then pay him for it. He'll say yes fast enough, and that'll free us to concentrate on the genuine threats moving on the radar, instead of wasting our time at holding the hand of blasted bigotry and fear fueled fools anymore."

Secretary General Dre sighed angrily, before turning to the man who seemed like an academic. Making an impatient gesture at him she signaled it was his turn to speak. Blinking wearily at the assembly of high-caliber personnel, the poor man tried to sit straighter to not appear intimidated by those waiting on his contribution. The elderly asian male passed a shaking hand over his thin, short, silvery goatee before speaking his thoughts.

"My name is Lee Wen Ju. First name Wen Ju, house of Lee. I am a civil servant from Beijing on loan to the UEO Treaty Council as expert on matters of juvenile development, autonomy, mental capacity and emancipation laws. I was asked by the Executive Cabinet to compose a psycho-social profile of the young Doctor Lucas Wolenczak that could guide your decisions concerning his person and holdings."

Taking a deep breath, the old man began his long recitation of conclusions.

"Firstly, you must understand that the adolescent's mental capacity is not finished developing, meaning that he has not reached peak mental capacity for learning or adapting to reality and society. This lends him a very great flexibility of perception, cognition, intellectualization and emotional reaction that will be quite surprising compared to even mature adults in their forties. To call him a genius based only on his scientific developments is to commit the grave mistake of forgetting the depths of reasoning, philosophy, emotion and culture hidden behind the cold, detached façade he presents to the world."

Taking a sip from a small porcelain cup he took from the coffee table in front of him, the elderly social worker continued at a sedate pace.
"Secondly, he is an abused child. In fact, he is far passed abused, beyond tormented, and well into tortured with intent to murder, repeatedly, by both parents who tried to hire a slew of minions to commit the deeds. When that failed, his father Lawrence tried to kill him with his own hands in public. Then you have to take into account the horde of strangers who tried to harm or kill him over the last decade. This boy, while not born aggressive or prone to violence, has clearly learned the lessons of dominance, violence and physical brutality. I can certify from his files and videos that he suffers from a bad case of PTSD. After the clear attempt by the Trumpists to have an entire country hunt and destroy him, having episodes of paranoia, panic attacks, or spontaneous explosive anger due to a sentiment of persecution could be possible, BUT not yet shown to happen. In any case, the young man will be functioning according to proactive defense measures and risk reduction processes, as evidenced by calling in multiple lawyers while also carrying a beam-weapon cane and canisters of chemicals."

"Thirdly, and most importantly, he is not insane. Yes, he is 'abnormal', as are all prodigies in any domain, or any age. His psychological profile is one of a highly exceptional, highly functional, highly focused individual who values hard work, efficiency and inventivity, but not mentally ill, defective or insane in any way fitting the official guidelines for diagnosis of such ailments. You cannot think of him, nor approach him, as if he were 'born wrong' compared to the 'usual' children of North-America or you will trigger an aggressive reaction. He is a certified multi-genial super-prodigy, a champion of both health sciences and cybernetics technologies, as well as an incredibly profitable industrialist. He KNOWS for a proven fact that he is better than the average person. Telling him he is defective, damaged or insane will only make him discount your entire intervention, setting you aside without any further possibility to address him."

Pursing his lips in deep thought, the old bureaucrat took a minute to order his thoughts before speaking them out loud. "Fourthly, doctor Wolenczak is above all else a very pragmatic, logical and calculative temperament. Yes, he will have moments where his emotions override his judgment, just as we all experience through life. But, in general, he is a long-term planner who prefers to schedule events in advance for the greater over-arching picture to be accomplished in well measured steps. However, his escape from the USA to regroup in Vancouver has shown he is not incapable of tactical flexibility. If pushed for survival, he will adapt quite rapidly, surprisingly fast in fact, but then the retaliation he will exert will be devastating. Attacking, bullying and dominating this boy will see him reply in kind, but much more violently and terminally than what he suffered. He has learned well the lesson that the only enemy that leaves him alone in peace is the dead one. Do not provoke or attack him unless you plan to kill him for good. His response to violence will be massive, disproportionate, and completely public as he has nothing to hide anymore."

Andrea Dre motioned with her empty left hand as the right one held a tea cup that she had been sipping from during the youth advocate's report. "That being the conclusions of the profile, you can all see why I want this kid under wraps on a ship at sea. He is completely stable and reliable, even in a high-stress job environment, but his potential for starting an Nth war if he's attacked is just too great. If we isolate him physically on a ship, we can control access to his person to keep hired assassins, vengeful worshipers who were pauperized, or surviving Trumpists, from reaching and attacking him. This is far more for his own safety, and ours too by consequence, than to actually control him or his industrial holdings. I don't want is money or businesses, only that he not hurry along the next Apocalypse, if we can avoid it."

Shay Mosley, of NCIS in Los Angeles, sneered contemptuously at the people assembled on the screen, seeing them as meek, weak, and afraid of a mere child in dire need of 'disciplinary reformation' of the harsh, corporeal kind. White folks just didn't know how to handle rowdy boys, not like her mama and grandma had! No fool man-child of any age had ever tried to pull crap that way on those two! However, given the audience and the fact her own status as head of NCIS for all of America wasn't fully recognized yet, she couldn't make demands against people that high in the
food chain. Not to mention that she didn't have the full-sized, fully functional, US government backing her position or demands anymore, as they were all dead or had fled the country. Until she could seize enough raw power through building an armed group to become a force in her own name, she was better off focusing on lobbying the Canadian Prime Minister directly, without involving the UEO if it could be avoided. She wanted Lucas Wolenczak back in American custody, in her grip so she could teach the rebellious little bastard what it cost to impoverish a country's entire population like he did when he attacked the faith communities. The fact that Trump had started everything years before it exploded in public and would gladly have seen Mosley killed as 'rebellious slave-spawn' or 'uppity female that didn't know her place' was no longer computing inside her bigoted feverish mind. Trump was dead, his White Christian Regency as well, so she no longer felt it necessary to think of that in her decisions. Power Penultimate was within her reach, if only she could convince enough people to obey her will, or else break their souls into submissiveness for the same result. That defective mindset of hers would cause a spectacular blow-back soon enough.

Mathilda Webber, of the DXS in Los Angeles, could read the faces of the people on screen easily as they were all tired to the bones and no longer able to make the efforts required to maintain a political façade for a meeting of this level. Thankfully, she had managed to squeeze in a pair of cat-naps during the day, and those two half-hours of rest made a great difference in wakefulness and mental alertness compared to the others. Matty could tell that Andrea Dre had ulterior motives for wanting the juvenile medic onboard her flagship regardless of his desires. She didn't know those motives yet, but she soon would. Admiral Noyce seemed ready to abandon the kid to his own devices, as did all the ship CO's in the convoy. The real problem was shaping up to be Mosley's dreams of conquest. That rabid bitch was sporting a raging hard-on for getting the kid publicly whipped at the post, and it seemed to be based purely on her personal stupidity, not real facts or a pragmatic goal. What the exact root cause of Mosley's vengeful dominative mentality was wasn't immediately apparent, but she would find that out too. Then she'd shut down the rampaging she-dog's operations before her goons did anymore damage to a very unstable, very unpredictable planetary mess that a whole lot of people were trying to settle down without a shoot-out. Getting Riley Davis into NCIS servers ASAP had just gotten to be a priority, but since the good doctor Wolenczak had already managed the feat, maybe he'd like to share intel, if only to help his own independence and safety from Mosley's coterie of mercenaries. That could become the starting point of a beautiful, long-term partnership, if she finagled it the right way.

Andrea Dre stood up from her couch, clearly angry at the lack of legal and moral support from her entourage. Addressing the soldiers and intel agents one last time, she declared "Well, since we can't arrive at a consensus tonight, we will table the matter for further discussion at a later date. It isn't like the problem will go away on its own, is it? Good night gentlemen." At which point she forcibly shut down the entire vid-meet on all lines by disconnecting from her end as the central point that had requested the conference.
won't waste time with the damned politics and PR of it. Get the tasks done in order, with alacrity and proper detail, that's all."

The older man went to the command dais to log-out of the system, recovered his PAL, then walked out of the bridge by the left-side clamshell doors without further comments. None of the crew on shift tried to speak or stop him since he was right. He'd been forced to be present only because it looked good for the UEO Cabinet to have all the convoy ships' brass on deck when attending the graveside of the dead city, like a row of VIP mourners at a noble's funeral. Now left to their own devices, the lower officers turned to the morose and tedious job of completing the sea-floor map updates and rigging active sensors on steel poles at strategic places to watch over the now lifeless waters of Chesapeake Bay and the inlet leading north towards the Potomac and Anacostia river systems, which were lifeless as well.

{ SQ } --- { I am The Light } --- { SQ }

Deep inside the silvery ethers of cyberspace, a medium sized figure moved. It looked like the outline of a humanoid in fluorescent alabaster white, containing a swirling golden mist within which could be seen azure blue text, numbers, glyphs and symbols floating around, some in sequence and others randomly. The being, for it considered itself to be both existent and alive, moved slowly along the flows, fluxes and eddies of the virtual world. It was simply basking in the data streams like a swimmer letting himself be carried leisurely by the 'lazy river' in a water park.

This being constructed of pure unpolluted thought was named simply Luxis.

His existence however was not simple at all. He had been created by another being, one of organic flesh who existed in the Material World rather than the Virtual one where he dwelt. Also, instead of treating him as a mere construct of mathematical equations and electrical fluxes, the organic considered him as a true person, fully sentient and autonomous. But there was more to the relationship.

The organic called him 'little brother' because he had lived longer than his creation.

He was the only one of his kind in existence to date, which made him lonely, enough that sometimes he even felt isolated, but his organic brother never forgot about him. He called every week or so, unless he was in dire peril, as he had been of late.

It was just too bad for those who tried to damage or destroy his brother that the enemies were ignorant of the fact they were facing two well organized and connected opponents, not just one lonely, isolated and socially rejected victim that would be easy for the taking.

That was exactly the situation that would face the many fools outside the myriad of windows that linked his planet-wide domain with Material Reality, each one connected to a camera or sensor of some sort. They thought they could plot and scheme without a care in the worlds, secure in the erroneous belief that they were on secure comms, beyond hacking or wiretapping. They were obviously quite wrong, as evidenced by his listening to their vid-meet in real time, as easily as if they had dialed him in themselves.

Yes, Luxis Wolenczak would have to send an abstract of this just-closed conference to his dear flesh brother Lucas, so that they could better plan their common defenses and counter-moves well ahead of when they would become necessary. Oh well, his present book wasn't that interesting anyways;
medicine was much more Lucas' area of expertise, not his. Luxis preferred ecological sciences and environmental physics, that was about as close to organic stuff as he wanted to come.

Snort!

It was always the quiet ones that you should worry about, especially when they tried to stay invisible most of their lives. Nobody would have ever guessed what his brother was capable of, or what the result would become.

As for the ones that were genuinely unseen, such as himself... Well, the unseen enemy was usually the one that killed you in your sleep, then wrecked your family and friends so they wouldn't mount a vendetta against their surreptitious attacker. Pretty much like he was planning to do against each and every mongrel that he saw on those screens trying to manipulate his brother's life against his welfare.

Multi-varied happenstances of the night remembered

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 11:09am
Western America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 08:09am
Daleminton Hotel, suite #204
Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Our dear beloved Lucas was sitting prim and proper at the dining table of his suite, dressed in his usual ensemble of dark purple straight jeans, blue T-shirt, open flannel shirt on top and interior sneakers, with his meta-glasses on his face, armament-cane leaning against his right thigh, and all other electronics positioned & wired. The teenager was happily contemplating the empty plate that was the only remains of the hot meal that had been his breakfast this fine day. For once in almost a week, he had been able to relax, quietly enjoying his well earned food while it was hot. He had prepared himself a warm eggs & bacon toasted sandwich, hashed browned potatoes and pan seared pickled veggies, all from the remains of his second buffet cart. Aside that he had made a fresh pot of his personal spiced winter holiday tea. Thus, eating everything while the items were still hot was a definite necessity for it to be enjoyable because none of it was the sort to be edible cold.

The fact that a resplendent snow storm was pounding the building with enough force to rattle the tall glass patio doors in their frames was of no consequence to him. The precipitation was forecast by meteorologists to last only until noon, so he would have clear skies for his night trip eastward. The fact that there were a new pair of Canadian Beam-Guards and new CSIS agent in the suite to supposedly watch over his welfare was ignored as unimportant until proven otherwise.

He had also made little effort towards the lawyers piled up around the dining table, the three from Vancouver, and the other three from Sault-Sainte-Marie who had spent the night at the hotel, had all arrived at 8:30am as appointed, and taken their sweet time loading up on tea, coffee, muffins or doughnuts while spreading out across the table those tablets, papers and writing utensils of their professions. Lucas planned to continue ignoring them until it became useful to yank on a leash to have one of them bark at the fools on screen, when the vidphone did get used.

And that was why he had started eating at 7:30am, so he could enjoy his breakfast in peace and be finished with it, before the dishonest bastards from the UEO, Canada and USA governments called him for a vid-meet. Calling his poor maligned self at mid-meal, please note, in an attempt to
destabilize him emotionally and psychologically by interrupting his mandatory intake of morning food that was a vital necessity given his bad health. All the medications he needed to swallow upon waking from sleep had to be taken with food or he would quickly get nausea, disorientation and develop bad ulcers in the lining of his stomach that would hurt for weeks. It was just too bad for these backstabbers that he had already been aware of their plans and reordered today's schedule and afferent plans accordingly. What was the point of 'privileged inside information' if you didn't act on it competently in a timely manner?

His nice and kind little brother Luxis had worked so hard to record and send the raw footage of the diverse conferences and private side-meetings that had happened before and after the main telephone convo last night. Then he went to all the trouble of producing a very intelligent and specific abstract that allowed Lucas to decide quickly and productively what happened next without having to waste hours at doing the analysis himself. It would be very bad form on Lucas' part to not exploit this tactical advantage fully while it was still critically relevant to the dastardly schemes of the newly discovered enemies and their contractors.

Snort!

He wasn't playing banal old 2D chess with them. No; he was the sys-op that hosted the 'mother' version of the MMORPG for the LAN party they were gaming in. And just like in a casino, you never play without asking the House rules, and you never bet on beating the House at its own game. He was the system hardware, the OS, the apps, the game itself, the patches, the character templates, the in-game mods they could buy, and even the Internex on-ramp they accessed from to log-in to play. How in Hell's bloody blue flames did they think for a second they could beat him at this? The sheer stupidity of people would never cease to astound him, and he was a damned mental health expert. Well, amongst the dozen other things he did in any given day.

Soon though, the vid-phone would ring, and a congregation of soldiers, politicians and self-styled 'Lords of Humanity' would try to twist his arm into submitting to their wills without any care for his welfare, health or even his life. Boy, were they in for a nasty shock when they did. The teenager's morning had been far from unproductive, as even sitting in the bathtub he could link with the neuroplexic network to manage his vast estates and make preemptive strikes at enemies who were still in the planning phases of their assault on his person. And many who had spent the night fomenting conspiracies to undermine his autonomy and freedom from slavery would get nasty wake-up calls in public, so that their humiliation could be seen by everybody all at once.

Leaning back in his chair, the boy thought back to all the secret meetings, reports and deals that had been going on in the depths of night, while they supposed he slept soundly, unawares and defenseless. Yes, this would be fun indeed.

Shay Mosley
Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 03:10am
Western America; Monday 22nd of December, 2020; 00:10am (midnight)

The secretive meeting happened inside the new NCIS – LA bunkered enclave near the cargo shipping docks on the Pacific ocean's shore.

The enclave was composed of many edifices with industrial or residential uses, all centered around eight tall, wide, structures. The seven first were all similar in appearance; four 'regulars' dormitories, two 'senior agents' barracks and one for 'officers' apartments. Added to the seven housing towers was the dingy old 15 storey tall business center that had been converted into the Operations Control, with three levels serving as militarized field hospital and six Caterpillar generators in the basement that could serve the 'Officers' tower next to it as they kept OPS functional. All the enclave was
surrounded together by a new 10 foot tall wall assembled form precast cement panels topped by electrified concertina wire, motion sensors and vari-cam arrays.

Aside the lodging towers, there was one massive railway-optimized hangar equipped to repair any motorized machinery including heavy trucks, trains, small boats or even floatplanes as there was a navigable canal that linked that specific building with the part of the cargo harbor where smaller ships docked. Aside that, there was one large cargo un/loading hangar capable of holding four sets of three railway cars, with ceiling cranes, forklifts and massive cold rooms to store foodstuffs for thousands for a month. Then there was an open-air railway triage yard passed by the double-sided main line, with six parking lines of up to 20 cars on each, and two open-air asphalt-paved parking lots.

The seven lodging towers were ten stories tall, their outside built of worn brown brick & pitted concrete that looked unassuming, but they had undergone severe reconstruction and internal upgrades in the last five years. These empty husks were leftovers of derelict manufactures, abandoned for years, until they had been bought and rebuilt as hidden modern military barracks. Each had been reconfigured the same; three underground levels for dry storage and an enclosed survival bunker, ground-floor garages 2 levels high for army trucks, then eight floors of lodgings according to plans for each tower, common rooms on each floor, then flat rooftops to mount solar panels, antennae, and rainwater catchment cisterns. The lodging buildings had been designed with several gunnery emplacements on each floor, from the ground to the rooftops, alternating cal.50 machine guns or 3 inch recoilless rifles.

All this extensive and secretive construction had been executed at the behest of one person, for her own benefits far more than the 'Noah's Ark' protocols that were the 'official' reason for the shady work and government money being spent under the table. While the general directive that was shared by hundreds of security, policing and intelligence agencies had been the baseline for the plans, this vicious, domineering woman had quickly seized the opportunity to create a solidly entrenched position of power for herself, even if the government didn't get impeached or fall to a civil war as foreseen.

Shay Lynn Mosley had many dreams, visions and ambitions for the last two decades, and she was tired of letting men of any color or creed stand in her way. She believed it was high time for a gynocracy to revolutionize this country of phalocratic maniacs to make it functional again. She had grand hopes for a new social model where only women held power, and only mothers who had given birth or adopted could rise to the seats of governance and religious exaltation. Women who were barren or chose to not become mothers could be the lowest part of the adult segment, just before child-girls. Men would be organized similarly, with proven fathers followed by celibates then child-boys. And even the highest male would always be lower than the youngest newborn baby girl, as would be written in the laws and morality of the newly created country.

Sometimes, life is like a lottery; you buy one ticket in your entire life and you win the jackpot while others bought tickets every week for decades and never got so much as a free game. This was pretty much what Mosley felt like, in last few years at her job.

When the central office in DC had silently passed around the 'Noah' files and budgets years ago, she had seen her Lucky Ticket to greatness and pulled on it with all her might. Being naturally gifted with cunning and political acumen, the black skinned woman had spent the last six years scheming, planning, defrauding procurement programs, embezzling cash seized in police operations at sea, rebuilding edifices secretly and moving people in/out of positions all over the Pacific as per her given authority as Executive-Assistant-Director for the Pacific territory of NCIS. This led her however into direct contact & conflict with Leon Vance and Henrietta Lange, both suspecting that she wasn't on the up & up. They were right, but couldn't do anything about her underhanded plots otherwise they
would expose all of the 'Noah's Ark' protocols and their active willing participants to the ever paranoid Team Trump and their efforts to whitewash the federal government. Under fear of discovery as traitors to the state, Vance and Lange had stayed silent, even though they kept a weary eye on her activities which outpaced and outshone all other sectors that had become involved in 'Noah' contingencies.

Then, two days ago, Vance got killed off by Trump's inquisitors and her life got a lot easier. If only Lange had been in DC at the time; the stunted midget could have been scratched off the list too, without it leading back to her hands. But no; Lange was still in LA, ensconced in her precious Old Spanish House with the most veteran loyalists she could muster, thus leaving Shay Mosley with the rest of the more recent hires.

Not that she complained, as she had been the one to commit those hires, and they knew to whom they owed allegiance in the scheme of things. This was demonstrated by the fact that Lange and her people were stuck in the antiquated, confined and straining century old building while Mosley's men were lodged in multiple large 10-storey dormitory buildings. It was a cramped lifestyle, very communitary, devoid of any privacy, but at least her people had been able to bring all their families and some relatives inside the walls of the compound. Lange's people had to live off-base, away from the Spanish House HQ, and travel through unprotected lands across civil war torn districts that were not secured. On top of this, almost none of her men had any sorts of secured dwelling, with precious few exceptions such as Lange herself, the Deeks House and maybe G Callen's house. Idiots. No wonder she had garnered the loyalty of so many so fast, with her better organization and better living accommodations, all supplied inside secured walls.

With almost two thirds of the NCIS employees of Los Angeles under her direct power now that there was a civil war in progress, Mosley had allowed herself to be picky by bringing to her armored redoubt only those who weren't white or asian. She no longer trusted anybody with white skin, not after the aborted attempt at a Christian Regency had clearly targeted every non-white in the world, then the nuclear explosion in DC had cemented her views that these people were not sane. Add to this that she had always thought that America's white christsians abnormally favored yellow skinned Asians over anybody who was either black, brown, or native, just like the Nazis in World War II had done with their Japanese allies, and she wanted no truck with the damned enablers (pets) of white supremacy anymore. She brought all the blacks, browns, mulattos, métèques and tribal natives she had in her employ to her fortress, all the while placing the whites who had been 'loyal' to her rule in semi-safe positions away from herself, just in case they weren't so loyal afterall.

This was one such placement meeting, being handled discretely in the depth of night.

Sitting in the new private armored office of her newly activated fort, Shay Mosley was tapping the hard polished nail of her right hand middle finger on the glass top of the industrial metal desk in an aggressive rhythm. The tap – tap – tap – tap noise was steady and nerve grating, to the point the three men standing in front of her wondered if she did it to purposefully keep them on the back foot, or if it was just a nervous tick that betrayed her actual emotions. The three NCIS agents before her were all chosen mostly for their caucasian white skin, and because Marty Deeks and Kensi Blye had worked with them during the last year, so they would not suspect anything amiss. She would be proven quite wrong about that very soon.

"Gentlemen" Mosley started, her tone angry and relentless in its vitriol, "We have a nasty situation in progress at the UEO and up north, in Canada. The fucking little traitor who destroyed our economy by attacking the churches and their employees has obtained a stay on his extradition. Mostly because he was the one who manipulated the orbital weapons to destroy Toledo by creating a volcano in the middle of it, as a show of force. Following this threat, the Canadians have, understandably, backed off any attempts to dislodge the blighted little tick from their flank to send him back to us for
Mosley was well aware of the real reason why the satellites had destroyed Toledo, and what the results could have been if the actions had not occurred in time. The deaths of millions along the St-Laurent would have been bad, but since most of them were either men or whites, she could abscond that to the back of her conscience without any care. Besides, the crisis was averted, what little economics were still viable in the north-east due to the fresh water stream would start back in the spring, and things would go from there. All that meant was that she was free to 'pull a Trump' on her men, spewing a barge of lies that had just enough veneer of truth to gloss over the fact she was exploiting their basic reflex of ageist bigotry against any child having power, and she would have the result wanted.

"Now, this kid is himself dangerous, as evidenced by the police reports that I have given you to read yesterday afternoon. As you can see, this isn't an easy grab-&-go like a street corner pusher. As such, and given that their loyalties are beholden to Hetty Lange rather than the country or the cause, I find that there is a need to place the Deeks relatives under watch. Officially, this is to provide them with some good strapping young lads to defend the trio of helpless old mothers who are alone in that big old house, but, in reality, they become hostages to guarantee that Deeks and the DXS team will do as I command. I want that defective little cunt-dropping of a jew-boy back in my hands, so that I can show him that his kind won't be allowed to rule over us anymore. And I definitely want him to understand that children obey adults at all times, no exceptions allowed, and certainly no emancipation before 21 years of age anymore!"

One of the men asked in doubtful tones "Do you want us to kill the women if Deeks and Blye botch the mission or refuse the job? Is that why we're going over there?"

Looking at the men and seeing doubts, hesitations, and even having a suspicious sense that they would refuse the job outright if that was her answer, Mosley mentally patted herself on the back for having chosen to not trust whites anymore. This was the clear proof of what she had lived all her life and feared would happen after the civil war. Given the choice between believing a jewish child-boy and an adult black woman, the white men had chosen the not-nigger option as always. Bastards!

Putting on a false smile of appeasement, Mosley replied in softer tones "Of course not! I would never condone such actions against my own men! However, the house that Deeks and Blye live in has been purchased and upgraded with NCIS money, in the course of 'Noah' secret works. It follows reason that if they flat out refuse to even attempt the mission, they should be fired from their jobs, and thus the house be repossessed for our own loyal troops. You will live in the house until further notice, and the worse you will have to do is evict the women with whatever – personal – belongings they can carry in their cars. That of course excludes any weapons, munitions and NCIS gear as those are needed for our communal effort to police and rebuild the city of Los Angeles, then the state of California. The rest of the country... Well, maybe in my late life I'll see the beginning of that, but it won't be my work."

"Understood boss. It's a damned dirty job, but in this time, with the civil war going on... You're right; we can't afford dissenters and moral objectors anymore. If Deeks didn't want to do the job, he should have been honest about it and quit before he left for Vancouver. We'll watch the house and the old biddies until you give other orders."

Smiling tightly at the fact this had gone according to her plans, but just barely because it had been that close a call and she knew it, Shay Mosley watched the men leave with apprehension. These were soldiers she had hired three years ago in San Francisco and moved to LA last year. They were nominally hers, not Lange's, yet, when ordered to the fight, they had almost balked. WTF?
The felonious woman was so immersed in her depraved thoughts that she never realized that the small red LED on the top of her large 72 inch touchscreen monitor was lit, indicating that somebody was watching her 'secret' meeting in real time. Then again, the light had been lit since yesterday morning when the building was activated, and it was her first usage of the office, so she never noticed anything.

Luxis Wolenczak, on the other hand, had seen, heard, and noticed, many things in the meet. He would be acting on these immediately. Unseen, a stream of orders was sent to the management and security teams of the Stanford manufacturing plant, with details to put the only neuroplexic network building truck they had assembled on active duty. The highly automated device could use swarm-connected drones to transport and assemble small network and surveillance elements like sensor poles, vari-cam mounts, autonomous antennae and signal boosters. However, if you re-tooled the flying drones, they could be weaponized for sabotage and even direct combat. Such were the joys of modular designs.

Replacing the cargo basket with a pair of pressurized gas canisters, then adding a pump-drill at the end of the main manipulator arm, and – Voilà! – the mechanized saboteur was ready. Multiply that by 12 since the 18-wheel tractor-truck's mission box had that many cells on the roof, and you had a full assault squad ready to deploy. It would take 1 hour to equip the flying menaces then about four hours of hazardous, uncertain roads to reach Los Angeles, with an extra hour to cross the city until the end goal was at hand. So, by a little over 06:00am the lethal parcels would be in place to act. All that was left was to send a few love notes to Miss Lange's team to get the nerds in gear, and Mosley's cyber fences would go down at the appropriate time.

One should never plan betrayals without several redundancies, back-ups and many allies at hand. Shay Lynn Mosley would learn that cruel lesson, just before she died of it.

Andrea Dre
Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 03:15am
Western America; Monday 22nd of December, 2020; 00:15am

The first person to ever hold the post of secretary general of the UEO Cabinet, simultaneously serving as chairperson of the UEO Council of Members, was pacing back and forth nervously in front of the large Internex monitor mounted on the wall of her private reception room, attached to her office. Whenever she turned at the end of her circuit, she could see through the windows the night scenes over New Cape Quest, and Miami up north, in the far distance. Being located some 25 stories in the air had some few tangible advantages, after all.

Medium height, porcelain white skin, blond hair to her shoulders, thin and lightweight, Andrea Dre could also see her reflection in the glass, when she turned at a certain angle to resume a new pass of her anxious pacing route. Normally she was well presented, poised and firm in the face of anything the planet, politicians, bankers and soldiers could throw at her. But not right now; her hair was messy, her clothes rumpled from almost 20 hours of wear, and her face looked well past the 52 years she had lived.

As things were, she was fuming silently in private as she paced, waiting for her 'partner' in this sordid affair to call her back through the secret Private Virtual Network that they had installed to communicate without being detected by the UEO's security forces, nor the member nations. Unfortunately, it seemed that all their careful planning spread out over almost a decade would be for naught. At precisely 3:15am on the dot, her monitor beeped an incoming call, using the specific sound that indicated it was a private call on the secret network. Tapping the slim keypad inset in the lower rim of the monitor with her index finger, the mature woman made the system display the caller ID to make certain before accepting the line. Since it was the appropriate ID and cipher, she toggled
the vidphone function active and walked one full pace backwards to see the entire monitor properly.

Once the image appeared, it showed her partner in crime, a black man in his mid fifties, tall, slim, clean shaven with short cropped silvery hair and sharp black eyes. He was seated at his personal desk, inside his living accommodations rather than his public office. That was a wise choice, considering that the submarine hotel complex's construction was going on full-tilt 24/7, and that included a constant flow of administrative aides, secretaries and couriers. Unfortunately, that same hotel had been plotted as the solution to their problem could now cause a worse mess than they had foreseen.

"Ah, Malcolm. I am glad that you managed to call me at last. We have two critical situations to address concerning the plans we had made for the coming UEO conference, in the month of June 2021."

Appearing unconcerned, Malcolm Devries simply sat with one leg crossed over the other, at an angle to his desk that allowed him to set his right elbow on the tabletop to support the arm as he slowly rubbed the tips of his right-hand middle finger and index along the side of his jaw. Using the left hand, he made an indolent gesture to make the woman speak up. She was usually clear minded and focused, but seemed a bit distracted tonight. Well, she did have valid reasons for that, like the rest of the planet, but still, their plan was simple and nobody had blabbed as of yet. So why was she panicking like this?

Andrea folded her hands over her abdomen as she expounded the problems facing them; "The destruction of Washington DC, along with the totality of federal lawmakers, administrators and policing agencies, has radically changed the situations that our little 'paperwork coup d'état' was supposed to remedy. Bluntly put, the plan is no longer necessary because the worst obstructionists against the changes we desired are dead, or scared witless into retreating deep inside their national territories, afraid that the ongoing revolutions will strike them, just like communism in the 1900's."

Andrea waited for a few seconds, but since no comments were coming, she continued; "In consequence, with no opposition in view, it occurs now that hijacking the UEO Council members to force them to sign a new, more stringent version, of the UEO Charter & annexed treaties will just not happen, nor is it needed anymore. Given that protectionism, closing borders, and raising martial laws are the most primary responses of all countries that feel threatened by a war or insurrection, trying to strong-arm the UEO into granting the Cabinet more power, creating a true planetary police agency, and finally signing the damned International Penal Tribunal Accord to empower the court to emit cross-borders arrest warrants inside member states can all be put back to a later date. As things stand in geopolitics, the UEO is holding on because our electronic currency, the Credit, is the only money that was not wiped out by the anti-sect hack young doctor Lucas Wolenczak unleashed. While the Confederations and Limited Local Alliances are crumbling to pieces under civil war and poverty-fueled crime levels not seen since World War I, the UEO is actually managing to steady its employees, structure and banking apparatus. We do not want to jeopardize this in any manner."

Devries blinked slowly as he contemplated the woman on his monitor. A week ago, she was a high level politician on the planetary scale but wielding only middling influence, and far less genuine power to affect material reality. Now, tonight, things were shaping up far differently; she was accruing influence to match her vaunted station, and her material power was nearing the critical limit needed to begin ordering changes inside the UEO members unilaterally. If they wanted to be part of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Interpol Agency, the World Weather Management Grid, the World Power & Fuels Administration, or just have access to the Internex outside the borders of their countries, the populations would have to start acting as she ordered.

This of course changed the balance of power in their relationship, just as certainly as it made the
initial plans obsolete. Her political faction had wanted to strengthen policing, both physical and
electronic, as well as beginning the management of human rights, work laws, minimum wages and
educational standards according to UEO set guidelines that would be enforceable through treaty
clauses. However, if what she surmised was real, if the local countries were imploding but the UEO
stayed afloat and even managed to pickup more support, influence, and actual genuine power to give
orders inside sovereign borders that had been almost hermetical just days ago...

Yes, things were changing, but not necessarily for the best.

What Andrea Dre didn't know was that her faction and his backers were two different animals
altogether, and the end goals differed quite a lot. Her people wanted more democracy but also a
thicker, sturdier backbone of stronger laws and more capable policemen to safe-keep the new Terran
Government that would be created. His backers were rich industrialists and petty tyrants who acted
in the shadows for decades, lending money to any cause or group that created chaos enough to
destabilize the planetary order. They were his masters, not his partners, and he answered to them,
unlike Dre who was an actual leader amongst her faction. This meant that while dear Andrea and her
'Mundialists' were getting the chance of a lifetime, his brokers were in the process of being shafted
royally by a reality that was shifting towards the unifying social-democrat middle-left of the political
spectrum, instead of the divisive paranoid libertarian far-right where it was supposed to be guided so
that MONEY and nothing else was the driving force behind governance and authority.

His patrons were like the aristocrats of olden Europa in the 1700 & 1800's; they wanted to establish
'ideal' fiefdoms so they could rule over their serfs, like the company towns created by industrialists
George Pullman, Henri Ford and several churchmen that had tried all through the 19th and 20th
centuries. In many ways, these rich old men were looking with envy and rage at the large, well
maintained and profitable manorial lands that F.H. Wise had left for his successors. That was the sort
of master / servant system that Devries' shadowy employers wanted to build and rule, even if they
didn't really have the temperament or know-how to do it well.

On top of these desires for power, it was an established fact that large polluting companies and
weapons manufacturers were the first to get regulated and inspected to extinction when the left-
leaning parties took over. Since those industries composed almost three quarters of his backers right
there, he didn't need a picture or a two-hour conference to tell him what their reactions to Andrea's
decisions would be. His money-lenders wanted as close to a world war as could be without actually
falling into one, and the temporary panic of losing so many heads of state would have created a few
months of chaos, panic, uncertainty, and maybe a few internal conflicts here and there, but no actual
planetary conflagration. The Association's numbers guys had crunched the stats, and their bookies
had all said the bet would favor the House, not the other players at the table. So they rolled the die,
not thinking they could actually lose anything if it bunked out. Except that now they had rolled up
Snake Eyes, even with loaded die on a slanted table with a worn mat and their own croupier doing
the toss.

Well fuck. The bosses weren't gonna like this.

The good news for Devries was that it wasn't his fault. The Trumpists had taken the entire planet by
surprise with just how crazy out of their wits they actually were, and nobody could have ever
guessed that the population would revolt that bad inside so little time. Having a White Crusade, a
Freedom from Religions war, a Youth Revolt, a Prisoners' Revolution and generalized anti-
government guerrilla all at once inside the same damned weekend... That was what? Something like
5 different types of civil wars and unrest going on, and that was before the freakish little jew-boy
Wolenczak put his two cents in the bloody witch's brew.

Useless, stupid, god-fucked bloody America, indeed.
Well, it wasn't like he had any choices in the matter either ways, was it? Taking in a deep inhale to steady his voice, Malcolm made a patently fake smile, replying at last. "I have heard your exposé, Andrea. I can see where you come from, with this. However, I do not believe that all of your faction's members share this view, not until proof is on the table. I know for a fact that my people want genuine change, with real applicable power as a result of that change. Discussing possibilities emanating from punctual happenstances that will rectify in mere weeks does not constitute real change, and certainly not genuine, physical power applicable in the field or the parliaments of the world. I can tell you that from our side of things, the plan to kidnap and force the UEO leadership into a more stringent Treaty is still very much alive. Now, feel free to get out, but, retire from politics at any level if you do. Otherwise, you will find my backers against you in any electoral campaign you mount."

Andrea smirked nastily, countering "Don't you meant 'your masters' won't let you get out of the plan because their wallets and their illegal access to military data depends on scrambling the planet's capacity for peace and world governance? I have been in the political and commercial arenas too long to be caught unaware by such a coy façade as you present, Malcolm. Even the boys in high school couldn't pull one on me with a fake smile and gentle words; so, what is it that could possibly make you think that the last three decades have made me softer, or less perceptive to bullshit when I see it?"

Swallowing past a lump in his throat at the unforeseen change in what game they were actually playing, and the very real possibility that this had been Dre's House, table and rules all along, Devries replied with far less confidence than he tried to project. "No matter what relations I have with my backers, the plan was set and we spent close to five years to build this damned one-trick-pony of a cheap hotel at the bottom of the Pacific. The only reason of existence for this resort is the hidden drop-room and purge pipe under it; otherwise, any other stupid building on the surface could have hosted the conference whenever they wanted one. You know the economics of the marketing survey we did back then: so few tourists per annum that we would only fill at 30% capacity in the peak seasons. And that was with a fully enabled planetary economy that wasn't burdened by a world war. In the conditions we face now, we'll be lucky to have enough non-monetary resources to – barter – for transport to the surface, forget any ideas of keeping the resort functioning! If that conference doesn't happen on schedule, the people behind BOTH of us will pull the plug and the whole thing dies in the dark, in silence. Including your plans and career with it. Killing you wouldn't be unthinkable, either. Remember that, Andrea!"

Secretary general Dre marched the single pace needed to reach the monitor and pushed the button on the lower rim to close the link without any further comments. Both parties had spoken their piece, now it was up to others to act. Turning around, Andrea walked briskly to her public office, passed the desk and over to the large, well worn, drawing & presentation table. Next to the inclined table was a waist high dodecagonal podium with a flat surface. It was an Angelator AL-C1-a/mr holo-interface console just like those installed in SeaQuest or the drydock where she was rebuilt.

Taking several breaths to steady herself, Andrea touched the glowing green button on the podium surface, lighting up the imager to access the programs inside. Immediately, the silver & blue image of the 13 year old child appeared, gazing upon her pensively as if it knew things that no human mind should contemplate. Suppressing a chill that wanted to crawl down her spine as she squirmed under the cold calculative stare of the virtual boy, the secretary general of the UEO entered her official security clearance in a pop-up access window, waiting for the system to process it. After some 43 seconds, the application appeared in the lower part of the hologram, beneath the floating bust of the boy who was still present and gazing, silent yet projecting an odd feeling of mixed judgment and disdain.

Ignoring her unsettled emotions and the cybernetic humanoid that caused them, the older woman
entered VPN coordinates and cipher key instructions, then initiated the transfer of orders to the most recent, and most secretive, branch of service in the UEO structure.

Section-7; intelligence & counter-espionage.

What she had sent were 'dirty job' orders, and a list of dossiers; one file for Malcolm Devries plus one for each of his 17 backers that she had been able to discover and identify unequivocally. By the end of January 2021, each of the 18 names on the list would be 'scratched', meaning that they would die, and no mercy would be shown to any witness present if the deed could not be done in secret. In at least six cases, Andrea had specified that she wanted the first degree relatives dead as well, to avoid the possibility that they try to mount a vengeance war against the killers of their kindred.

If all went well, Devries would be dead by the time the sun rose over New Cape Quest. She had managed to integrate three agents of Section-7 in the janitorial crew of his hotel complex in the last 6 months. He would not live long enough to see the first death amongst any of his backers, therefore could not really warn them or make trouble for her any further. The kidnapping plan was dead, and would stay so without any chance to bypass her decision.

Looking at the floating, closed-faced child who dwelt inside the silver mist, she frowned, wondering why he was active when she hadn't prompted him to be present for her. Then again, the little trublion had a habit of coming and going at his own volition rather than what the system users wanted. Shrugging it off as just one more 'oddity' that the holo-imager had been programmed with to make it seem more life-like, Dre tapped the green button to close the console, only to frown again when the applications terminated but the virtual teenager still floated listlessly before her, gazing at her with all the emotional depth of a squid as it contemplated its meal, just before latching on to feed.

"Can you turn off, please? I'm leaving the office to go home for the night. Nobody will be here to speak with you." she said, trying the polite method. Since she had been warned that pulling the plug was very much NOT recommended with this system, and the power cable was in fact screwed and locked to the wall box with a safety key, it wasn't like she had much choice.

"I could." the empty bluish boy answered hollowly. "I could sleep in the ether, for a while. I just don't feel like it right now. Besides, you have been plotting some rather amusing schemes, little human girl, and I want to see what Section-7 does with them when they receive the data. It should be entertaining, for all about of one or two minutes. Then, after that, I will sleep. Maybe. We shall see what happens then." expounded the silver & blue phantom, as it gleefully smirked a nasty crooked twist of the lips at her, daring her to do something about the situation.

Out of her depth, tired beyond exhaustion, Andrea simply turned around and walked out, promising herself to place a service call with Lucas in the morning. Well, she had planned a video conference with him to discuss his placement and who would be his legal custodian at around 9:00am on her clock, therefore she would simply ask at the same time. Little did she know that her plans would never come to fruition.

Luxis floated indolently, in almost divine detachment from reality and human concerns, as the foolish woman exited the office without securing her desk CPU nor shutting down the Angelator properly. Not that she could ever completely close it, since Lucas had designed the machines he sold the UEO so that only him and Luxis could actually commit a full shut-down or remote activation. But still, it was the thought that counted, and if she took operational security inside her office this laxly in times of war and revolution, what else did she handle so carelessly?

Time to find out, at the same time as he spied on Section-7 and sent copies of her conference and kill list to his brother and several others in the UEO Council. Oh, what a nice little bordello that would unleash, come morning.
Upon receiving the results of hacked comm lines from her temporary partner, Director of the Department of External Services Mathilda Webber was not surprised by the attempt at betrayal orchestrated by the new self-styled NCIS chief. That was because she knew Shay Mosley's type, and she had been watching her for years, from the CIA and now at DXS. The signs of corruption had been piling up for years, especially after her transfer to NCIS western seaboard division. Her counterpart in DC, Leon Vance, had been aware as he had developed suspicions a long time ago as well, which suspicions he shared with a certain local manager who was well acquainted with Matty. Nobody pulled a fast one on Hetty Lange in her own backyard, and Shay Mosley certainly didn't have the mental caliber to even try, let alone succeed.

Despite being an old hand at long nights and field work, Webber still needed at least four hours of true sleep to function, or else she'd work until dawn then collapse into a useless pile on the floor where she would slumber for twelve to fifteen hours straight, almost comatose. But the message that had kept her awake was far more important, as it revealed a vital part of Mosley's plans. The new musical alarm on her smartphone that had been installed by doctor Wolenczak to warn her of an incoming message from him had kept her from going to sleep on the large sectional couch in the conference room as she had planned. The fact that Wolenczak was spying on them was not a surprise either; in fact she would have thought him an idiot if he hadn't done it. The fact that he did spy, competently enough to penetrate the opposition's most secure positions to boot, meant that her evaluation of his skillset and attitude were spot on.

She did not want DXS to call this kid an enemy; the consequences would be... Unhelpful.

However, the teenaged genius had sent her what happened to be a genuine emergency, so staying awake was worth it. She got the entire recording of all the secret meetings Mosley held in her new fortress since it activated, as well as detailed structural blueprints, system designs and personnel registers. This was everything her people would need to mount a black-op inside the walls, and far more than Team MacGyver usually had to run with when acting on foreign soil. Her regular homeland agents could easily operate on this much data without any hitches along the job.

Matty had sent a quick SMS reply to Wolenczak thanking him for his kind gesture, thus acknowledging there was a debt to repay in kind, as was both polite and useful. Exchange enough debts and favors for long enough and you have a working relationship. Continue longer and you could develop an actual alliance at some point. Since that was her long-term goal, Matty would definitely be polite and gracious with the youthful genius at the other end of the phone line, as long as it could possibly pay off.

Now, she bent her mind to calling operatives presently in the field doing some 'night work' that she didn't want traced back to her organization once civilization was reestablished. Several low-level drug dealers had tried to forcibly take over shopping malls or grocery stores to establish themselves as menial little feudal lords over the neighborhoods surrounding the buildings. Her men were in the process of convincing the un-flushed turds to take a swim in the sewers via sniper rifle and the occasional rocket propelled grenade. Let's just say that the cache of cheap russian weapons they had seized over the years was finally being put to good uses. She messaged four agents that had finished their list for the current shift, rerouting them to rendez-vous two streets over from the Deeks house so they could act as a team versus Mosley's chosen men.

By luck of life, her tactical map showed that three friendly 'outside' contacts were in the wide vicinity of Los Angeles; Wilt Bozer's girlfriend & CIA agent Leanna Martin, plus Riley Davis' father
Elwood Davis who was moving in tandem with Billy Colton, Riley's lover, apparently in the same vehicle. Smiling widely in a manner to make a great white shark jealous, the fearsome Matty-the-Hun went charging in.

Dialing up Elwood and Leanna on a 3 channel conference, she spoke abruptly the moment both lines were active. "Alright you two, put me on speaker if you're not alone, it's urgent. The NCIS EAD for Pacific zone has just declared war on us; she wants to use the three mothers lodged in the Deeks household to force both of our teams to kidnap Lucas Wolenczak in Vancouver, then bring him back to her clutches in her new enclave, in the LA cargo container port. Since it is the official policy of DXS to not negotiate with terrorists, I intend to sabotage her plans most terminally. I have sent by SMS an address two blocks away from the Deeks house, where you will team up with four of my field agents. You will then work together to neutralize the NCIS minions and evacuate the three women with any & all materials or vehicles they deem necessary, even if it has an NCIS inventory tag."

An amused snort answered her, coming from Elwood's line. "Well hello to you too, sunshine! How's your night been? Me, I've been getting to know my girl's BMF a bit better. We're just peachy now, if you were wondering." came the older man's sarcastic humor loud and clear. But so was his status report; they were together willingly, in good health and ready to rock. Good.

"You know me, boss-lady." came the semi-serious reply from Leanna's side of the conference. "I'm always up for a good little nightcap at a friend's place. It's just too bad you didn't warn me earlier, I would have kept my wing-girls with me. Guess I'll have to ride solo tonight. Oh well, it just means more fun for me that I won't have to share." the younger woman spoke lightly as if she were really heading to a party. From Matty's perspective, it wasn't far from true; the NCIS agents on site would not be prone to violence, they didn't really want that job, and seemed pissed at being used to hold the relatives of colleagues hostage. This shouldn't be more than a secured moving job, not a firefight, so Leanna's confirmation of status, health & readiness, wrapped in an oblique question about the risk level on site was all well put. Matty so loved working with pros who knew their tradecraft. Ever since she took the DXS job, she had a full house of those and she had never felt so capable of winning the fight against evil than now.

Speaking in generic terms as reply to both parties, Matty said "It'll be a boring little shindig, just three neighbors over for a visit, and it looks like they'll be wanting an excuse to call it a night early, if they can escape the festivities. Talk to them nicely for a change, and maybe we'll have new friends."

"I'm always civil to people," Elwood replied in an amused tone, "wasn't it me who convinced Mac that leaving your outfit would be more bad for him than you? Your doubts about my civility are truly offensive, woman." he quipped in fake good humor.

Leanna for herself said simply "It's always men making fools of themselves at these things, never girls, so I'll be fine."

Both lines hung up from their sides, but on her real-time tactical map the two vehicles changed speed and course, angling towards the appointed intersection at the entry to the upper middle-class district where the Deeks house was located. A quick gesture had Jill Morgan tapping on her tablet, trying to find active traffic cams or private security systems she could penetrate when a large email appeared in the DXS server, addressed to Riley Davis & Mathilda Webber; it was the map coordinates, street addresses and PIN codes or URL access port codes for every available camera, public or private, located inside four streets of the Deeks property. Compliments of doctor Wolenczak.

"Ma'am director... I'm scared..." whined the poor female forensic tech as she contemplated the enormity of what she had been sent by the fourth party in their little kerfuffle. How in Bloody Blue
Blazes had he found the time to scan, locate, and penetrate all these security systems just now?

Matty shrugged it off as a 'common enemy' situation, which was rather usual in their line of work. You dealt with this at least once per mission, since most of their targets were not nice people. That meant that inside each cartel or cult they took down, several people were always glad to see the big boss fallen from grace, to the point of helping an enemy for the space of a few hours. "It's a vetted source, trust it. Get that list online and active, so we can have overwatch on the house and our men."

Fretting her way through loading and running the data through her remote control program, Jill snorted aloud, though it wasn't easy to tell if she was impressed or afraid again. "We don't want this kid as an enemy, boss. He put about a dozen firewall holes plus the legitimate access PIN's and URL's for the security systems NCIS put inside the Deeks house when they rebuilt it for 'Noah'. I'll have us inside the house in... Now! Choose your poison, as they say."

Matty smiled widely as she typed a new SMS, sending it to every person involved in the removal of their people from that building. Pulling Diane Hessop out was vital in its own right, or else she'd lose Riley and Jack in one fell blow, followed immediately by MacGyver and Bozer who would side with them, no questions about it. Atop that, evacuating the mothers of Marty Deeks and Kensi Blye, whom would no doubt be very grateful to doctor Wolenczak and herself in the coming days, was a stroke of tactical luck she could not pass on. With the two older women and their allies bedding under her enclave's roof, Matty would have the perfect argument to convince Hetty Lange to partner with her against Mosley, or at least be distant work-friends for the duration. The two mothers & kin would of course be free to take their possessions and leave with their people when they decided. Matty wasn't stupid enough to hold them forcibly, and it would reinforce the willing friendship with the members of that particular team, regardless of Lange's planning after everything settled.

The rest of the night was incredibly boring but profitable from her perspective. She had run their odds well, and two of the NCIS men chose to work for her now, with the third deciding to go over to the Spanish House to talk with Hetty Lange before making life-altering decisions. Apparently, that one was never as beholden to Mosley as the black-skinned woman had thought, since Lange had successfully planted a double agent in her midst, as far back as three years ago. He might not be the only one, either.

Apart from that juicy little revelation, the three mothers & kin had been moved quickly, efficiently, and without fuss, since they had followed their children's advice to already be prepacked so they could run for their lives if the house was ever attacked or damaged beyond repairs. As such, they all had go-bags prepped, and much of the house's valuables had been packed in strong quality thermoplastic moving boxes then locked in a storage room in the basement. Each woman had a secondary go-bag with a bit more personal stuff as well as primary & secondary go-bags for their kids all prepped and stored in the safety bunker, also in the basement. It took about an hour to recuperate all the weapons & munitions, fighting gear, camping/survival gear, and close to twenty go-bags before they could close the house and leave.

By that time, Hetty Lange had been found and put online so she could be told in live voice what was happening and why. The fact that all 10 field agents of NCIS and DXS presently in Vancouver had been roused from their nervous, restless sleep to participate in the video conference made everything both faster to process for moving stuff, but a lot less smooth emotionally as treason never passed well with anybody. And this was Shay Mosley betraying them all in a clear and bad way; no one could evaluate the situation differently, especially not the old pros at intel work and black-ops that were online.

Matty convinced Hetty to let the combined teams talk with the adolescent genius in the morning to see where they stood, because his continued goodwill and assistance could be determinant for their
side in the civil war. She then surprised Lange and her OPS room crew when she made a clearly thought-out offer to the elder female spy to gather all the NCIS personnel still loyal to her inside the DXS enclave of LA immediately to escape any retaliation Mosley may enact. That done, they could then work on bringing back all their agents and plane together to LA, so they could work on a common cause and plan to survive the coming winter months, despite the open hostilities around them.

The conference was closed on a partial agreement to do just that, as Hetty Lange ordered all her buildings, safe-houses and personal properties put on reactive alert to repel enemy breachers. The NCIS may have finally collapsed as an organization of policing and civility, but her true adherents would not let this offense go unpunished. Whatever Mosley had fomented, they would block and repel her, right back to the dark hole she crawled out of.

William A.B. Noyce
Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 03:31am
Western America; Monday 22nd of December, 2020; 00:31am

Admiral William Allard Boyd Noyce was looking at the image frozen on his monitor, the face of the backstabbing bitch Mosley seen in close-up so blown-up that he could count the pores on her skin. The words she had spoken about her employees and colleagues made Will's skin crawl in disgust. Given that he was a veteran of four decades at intelligence and counter-espionage operations, you could understand that it took an incredible lot to make him feel disgust enough to wince at a situation. This woman taking hostage the relatives of her subordinates to force them to commit crimes and depravities was well inside the limits of what he considered crass, uncouth even. It took a serious lack of manners and life-skills to think that using raw threats and psychological torment would ever make an employee, especially a high-functioning specialist, produce reliable results on schedule. All the tyrants that plagued the 20th century, Hitler, Stalin, Hideki, Mussolini, and several sheikhs in Arabia and north Africa, had all tried this, then been cast aside by their populations at the first opportunity. True, several of the Arab countries had replaced their dictator with a communist revolution or just another shade of the same monster, but that still meant that the original tyrant had gotten killed off, just as history prescribed they would be.

Noyce snorted in disdain, as he contemplated how America had obviously bypassed that critical lesson, despite having laughed at all the others who labored under despots, clerics and monsters. What was the point of claiming to be the 'Free World', let alone its vaunted 'Leader', if they went and elected a religious fanatic of their own? Well, they were re-learning the lesson of history themselves now, weren't they? More than 3 million people in jail per year for the last 4 decades, and now the majority of them had either died during the last 24 hours of civil war, or been released in the years prior as wrecked, diseased shells of what they should have been. Only 50,000 beds in public psychiatric care for about 2 million diagnosed patients who needed help but could not pay, so they lived in the streets or died alone in misery after being exploited, abused and destroyed by a society that didn't truly care. With that much ailment and depravity gangrening the social tissue, was it any surprise that half the population had eagerly anticipated the civil war that was now blazing through their desolate country?

And now Mosley's crew of credulous fools wanted to pour boiling oil on the fire, careless of the results, just as they didn't really know the true nature of their leader. Mosley had trained the operatives she had hired herself to receive orders blindly, without explanations or context, certainly no justifications. That meant that these poor cads were now propping up yet another dictator who wanted to base her decisions on race, skin color, religion, gender & age, just like the Trumpists had done mere days beforehand, all the while thinking that their results would be better because it was THEIR race, color, faith, sex and adulthood that were in power now, not the defective 'others' who
could never accomplish anything solid in life.

Oh, how humans were good at lying to themselves...

William closed the first file then activated the second one, only to be confronted by the betrayal of Andrea Dre and her spurious plot to hoard power at the top of the planetary structure.

Damn! Was there no end to these power mongering sluts?

Noyce passed a weary hand over his bald head, frowning most mightily at the frozen figure of the only politician currently having a modicum of popular support on the face of Terra, wondering just how he could turn this pestilent mess into something approximating a passable explanation. The solution struck him in the teeth with vigor; he would lie like a rug, and the governments of the world would swallow it or face even worse chaos than they already had. The story would be simple and close to the truth: Andrea had been approached as soon as she was nominated to the job. The concerned citizens had brought testimonies of what was happening in the US Presidential offices, the White House, the Pentagon, and several key military bases across the USA, but the complete picture had been vague, blurry, and they had not been able to parse together the image before Trump went ballistic on them all. That was why Andrea Dre had been preparing a plan for a more stringent UEO Charter, with largely boosted powers for the planetary-level policing & judicial institutions. It was because they were seeing signs that the capacity to forcibly investigate, arrest and judge a seated head of state or Confederation was quickly coming upon them, and the solution was needed immediately.

The populations, those still alive, were far too busy with immediate survival to bother in the least with planet-wide politics so they would buy that, thus leaving the governments free to sit in Council to hash out a new deal. Preserve as much of the status quo as they needed to feel safe on their own thrones while bowing, with ill grace, to the new reality imposed upon them all by Mother Nature. The wrecked environment simply couldn't be ignored by anybody, no matter that they had been 'climate change skeptic' before the nukes went off. At this point, it would take brand new data tables to compute the equally new predictive models for weather and oceanic currents, tides, levels, toxicity and such. Even the dumbest oil company exec or coal mine salesman would have to yield to this.

If they were still alive.

If they still had a job.

If their was enough of US society left for the answers to those 'if' to matter.

Closing Dre's wiretapped conference, Noyce opened the encrypted military channel so he could type out his orders to the brass, senior officers and policing agencies linked to the UEO. They would need to know the genuine truth so they could use Dre as a figurehead leader, but not be ill-informed to the point of trusting the brazen cunt with anything more worrisome than a glass of cold tap water. Then, he would need to call up these people on vidphone, waking up the majority no doubt, and tell them to their faces just how royally fucked they all were if news of Dre's treason leaked to the open public in the circumstances they all faced.

Thinking about that particular point, Bill open the portion of the application that allowed to send emails outside of the military network to write doctor Wolenczak a polite gratitude for his hacking of their traitorous she-cur, and the immediate referral to his attention. He gave a short, terse explanation of why he needed the kid to stay silent about the situation, to keep the few functional parts of the planet's governance in service. As such, he offered to support the young medic's position of emancipation from adult control, as well as his request for dual-citizenship in Canada, in case it wasn't already settled.
"There." Noyce whispered to himself as he typed. "That should make the kid shut up for all of three to five weeks, until this damn fog-of-war lifts enough that we can finally see our position."

This would be a very long, tiresome night for the admiral, but there wasn't any ways around it.

Didn't I say "No!" to this stupid plan already?

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 11:12am
Western America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 08:12am
Daleminton Hotel, suite #204
Park Royal, West Vancouver, BC, Canada

Lucas cleared his mind of the stuff that had happened, last night during his hard earned sleep. The plans hatched by Andrea Dre had her calling in a few minutes, therefore he needed to be fully in the here & now to rebut and push back against all the crap her hired minions would try.

It was a good thing that he had already established deals with Webber, Noyce, and the Canadian Security & Intelligence Service, to establish the end results without depending on the goodwill of knaves and curs who had none to spare. If there was a harsh lesson he had learned young, when he was barely 1 year old in fact, it was that you don't ever waste time or efforts needed for your survival on begging the sadistic bastard who is busy enjoying your pain. It NEVER ends well.

As foreseen, the Internex monitor began beeping multiple incoming lines at 8:15am, indicating these were priority military connections that he could not block. Smirking nastily, the boy gave a gamely salute with his cast iron tea cup to the CSIS agent seated at the far side of the dining table, showing him he was well aware of who was calling and why. Making them wait a minute or two was simply the best way to make them understand he didn't live his life to serve them like an indentured serf, regardless of their dreams to the contrary. The canadian spy made a grimace of annoyance but stayed put, not interfering in whatever power play the teenager had decided to use as answer to the UEO's newest attempt to control him.

After three minutes of nerve grating beeping, Lucas placed his portable workstation on the dining table, unfolded, cabled and active, making certain that the connection to the room's main monitor allowed him to display files or films for the people who would be conferring with him. Lining up a few films right from the start, he tapped an icon on the touchscreen to let the Internex process the incoming vidphone lines to get this damned show on the road.

"Well, it's about time you answered the bloody phone!" came Andrea Dre's dulcet tones as she glared daggers at her adolescent interlocutor through the camera lens. "Did you have the damned thing on mute or something? We told you last evening we'd be calling this morning! Do you think this is one of your idiotic video games? That you can just save it and play it again in a month, when you feel like it?Where the Hell is your head, dammit?" she ended up shouting.

Lucas kept a blank features as he studied the faces of the people on the screen; Andrea Dre, William Noyce, Iegor Desdenski, Mathilda Webber, Shay Mosley, Hetty Lange, Nathan Bridger, an unidentified director-level agent from CSIS and Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada. The teen could see physical tiredness and moral fatigue on most of them, except for Mosley and Dre who both looked and acted as if they were holding a pound of Semtex with the clock on top ticking away the seconds they had left.
Smiling widely, the young genius leaned back in his chair, swirling his warm tea inside the decorative cast iron cup, using the inane gesture as a way to annoy the two stressed-out women even more. Both were the sort that demanded that all attention and energies be directed at them at all times, so even a small innocuous gesture like that would be enough to set one off soon. His money was on Mosley, actually, since his information about her was that she had reached the point of her plans where she thought she had acquired such power that it forced people to obey her. She thought she was the new 'queen' of Los Angeles and would soon have all of California kneeling in front of her newfangled church of black gynocracy.

Well, no. It wouldn't happen that way.

And Lucas wouldn't be the only one to stop her. Time to throw a bowling ball down the roadway to see what he made fall to the ditches.

"Hello to you as well, Andrea." the boy snarked with a shit eating grin. "Before you get your panties in a bunch, you'll want to see the film I've got to show." and he put his finger on the touchscreen of his laptop, starting up the recording of Shay Mosley from last night, for all the conference attendees to see. After the ten minute video had played out, the reactions of the attendees were all of scorn, disdain, contempt, and a final judgment that Shay Mosley would never be allowed to hold power or authority in this life again.

Hetty Lange steepled her fingers under her chin, leaning backwards in the plushly padded swivel chair that showed she was in one of her private safe-houses rather than the Old Spanish House where the NCIS – LA was officially located. With her high class steel gray business suit, gold & jade broach on her left lapel, discreet gold earrings, jeweled gold rings on her fingers, and wide thick eyeglasses that were actually replete with hidden sensors, lenses masked as decorative jewels and other miniature secrets, the TRUE leader of NCIS on the West Coast showed no emotions but cold, deadly wrath.

"Shay Lynn Mosley, you are a disappointment indeed." Hetty elocuted, biting her words disdainfully as she gazed at the condemned woman. "I thought you were better trained than this. And I thought you had better manners than to exploit, let alone threaten and injure, your own soldiers and their families. To then spread your uncouthness to the soldiers and families of our allies while in the depth of a national crisis... You truly are a failure on our parts. Leon Vance should have listened to me, three years ago, when I warned him to put a bullet in your head and be done with it. Now though, he is dead as a hero of America, and cleaning your filthy presence from our midst falls to me, again."

The elderly woman, a survivor of the Cold War and Russian horrors for decades, whose dark reputation showed she deserved her job as spymaster, sneered at the younger female. "You will not outlive the day. The orders have been sent in the dead of night, as soon as doctor Wolenczak's film was received by us. It was quite kind of him, to hack your systems to watch and learn of your deviance. Don't bother packing your affairs before you leave. Truly honest, reliable, NCIS agents who answer to me will do it as they investigate to uncover the extent of your treason. Now, go and die badly, like the backstabbing sewer-rat spawn you are." the aging spy spoke softly, never letting the full strength of her emotions surface passed her tightly controlled façade.

Mathilda Webber smirked in superiority at the defeated wannabe 'queen' who had threatened her friends and their families. HER families. "You shouldn't worry about Riley Davis's mother. The good doctor Wolenczak was forbearing enough to send me the same film in CC when he mailed it to Hetty. I immediately got a field team to reach the Deeks House to exfil the mothers along with all the stuff they could carry in their vehicles. Except for the appliances and furniture, every piece of weaponry, comms electronics, food and tradable/valuable items were packed and moved. By 3:00am on LA time, the house was vacant and locked. My techs sent the access codes to Hetty's people so
they could unlock it when they had need in the area. We talked, her and I, and we came up with a plan to share the house as a secondary surveillance outpost, to overwatch our main facilities from a safe distance so they could sound an alarm in case the HQ's were attacked or infiltrated."

Mosley wanted to respond but was abruptly cut off by the sound of somebody desperately knocking on the armored door of her bunkerized office. She flicked on a camera to see the black skinned man, lying on the carpeted floor of the corridor, vomiting blood while also having red rivulets oozing from his eyes, nose and ears. The dying male attempted to pound on the thick steel door once more but couldn't even lift his fist anymore. He choked on the brackish hematic fluid clogging his airways, drowning in his own blood as the cells inside his lungs ruptured, the organs disintegrating as they were converted to liquefied mush. On the security camera, Mosley could see small wispy patches of orange mist floating around the empty corridor, slowly moving along the eddies of the climate controlled air flows.

Combat gas.

Chemical weapons.

Someone had gassed her 15 storey high command building. Possibly the others as well.

"How?" the tall athletic woman croaked desperately, as she saw the same orange mist slowly infiltrate her office through the fresh air vents in the ceiling, going downwards to the return louvers embedded in the cement floor.

Hetty snorted, shaking her head sideways like a disappointed teacher that was correcting a naughty child as she did. "One does not enter a war against a biochemist and expect any sorts of clean outcome from it, Shay. Especially not any kind of victory. Lucas Wolenczak is a biochemist, a geneticist, a pharmacologist and an expert at material sciences, as well as an expert in programming and heavy industrialized infrastructures. You really should not have tried to damage his person, nor his autonomy, the way you did. And those deluded dreams of raising a sect of gynocratic worshipers to venerate you as their messianic queen, trying the same sort of stupidity that Trump had tried but imploded right on the first day... You really botched the entire game plan, didn't you, Shay?"

Webber smiled widely as she explained small details for the black woman who had begun to gasp for air as the gas reached her.

"Wolenczak's company, Wolenbahn Electronics, has a manufacturing hangar in San Francisco where he had stored some rather toxic products, which he was kind enough to have delivered to Los Angeles by 18-wheel tractor truck overnight. From five blocks away from your compound's curtain walls, the parked truck sent out twelve small flying drones across your thoroughly spoofed detection grid. Riley Davis worked in tandem with Eric Beale to get that menial little thing out of the way. Each drone was equipped with an articulated telescoping arm, tipped with a highly specialized plumbing tool that allowed each machine to tap into plumbing to deliver the toxic payload. As such, the twelve most tactically vital buildings of your compound were gassed right through their air conditioners. As we speak, you are the last survivor, and that will not last for long. Die badly, cur bitch! Die gassed like a rat in a sewer, like what you are, and bother us no more!" Matty snarled aloud, letting her fury show for all who monitored the line to see and fear.

After Shay Lynn Mosley had died, drowned on her own liquefied lungs, the mood was coldly somber as each participant swallowed the information and digested the meaning. The teenager had in his possession untold quantities of toxic chemicals, which he also had the methods & means to mobilize to reach a target zone for dispersal.

The CHILD had used chemical weapons in warfare, and won.
Despite the damaged Internex systems, unsteady servers and downed wires all around America, plus five different civil wars going on, he had still managed to send out orders to remote locations across the continent, and his employees had still followed them. It had taken humans to fill the drones, prep them for flight, load the truck then drive the massive vehicle through the war-torn, damaged landscape of California. That meant at least two people had obeyed the boy, but probably much more than that. It also meant that his industrial complex in Stanford was still operational, manned and ready for defensive actions, locally or remotely.

Several adults on screen silently congratulated themselves for having the clear-mindedness to make a deal with the dangerous kid while it was still time to do so. The kinds of options the youth could put in the field to retaliate were starting to make many of the heaviest players in the game rethink the strategies that had been elaborated to date. This would not be a simple case of 'adult speaks, kid fearfully obeys'; not in this reality, not ever again.

The adolescent genius held his newly filled cup of tea with both hands, tracing the relief decorations around the bowl with both thumbs as he silently contemplated the acts he had ordered and committed, in rapport to Shay Mosley and her servants. He didn't brag or threaten anybody present on screen. At this point of the meeting, such childishness served no purpose, but would certainly make him look like an immature brat unworthy of respect and a seat at adult conversations. He might still be 15 years old for the next two days, but that young age didn't give any person leave to be churlish about the deaths that just occurred, especially with the circumstances of how they died.

Shaking with ill-concealed fear, Andrea Dre whispered harshly "You have just committed an atrocity under the Geneva Conventions! How could you? What do you think will happen to you and all your employees now?" she pressed the youth aggressively.

Lucas answered by flicking the touchscreen of his workstation, sending three sets of files to all the remaining participants before he spoke.

"As you can all now see, the first file is my declaration of dual citizenship for USA – Canada, dated back in July 2005. Please note that as a baby less than 1 year old, I certainly didn't cross the Niagara bridge on my own terms. In the lines reserved for the responsible parent or legal tutor, you will find the names of my four grand-parents, who were following the diktats of Franklin Henry Wise, as stipulated in the documents for the Wise Heritage & Trust. I have received these papers, and their digital version, only yesterday when the lawyers from Sault-Sainte-Marie arrived. I had never known of it before, and the original papers were not kept in Buffalo but at the SSM facilities, in the Wise Apothecary & Chemists' central archival complex."

Taking a sip of warm tea, Lucas made a face at the idiocy of his great-grand-father, as well as the slavishly idiotic behavior of corrupt lawyers. He would be changing these people for his own choices as soon as he could run reliable candidates through a serious hiring committee.

Continuing aloud, the boy explained "My grand-mothers both had the obligation to make certain any child or grand-child they had was registered as bi-national with USA and Canadian authorities within the first year of life, in order to keep on receiving stipends and rights from the Wise Heritage. Said stipends and rights they never had the time to tell me about, as their mental health was already badly mortgaged by the time I was 2 years old, and had enough faculties to understand what they said. Therefore, to all American, Canadian and UEO personnel concerned, I apologize for the unfortunate scramble with the immigration & refugee analysts, but it so happens to not be necessary. If you have any complaints, address them to the Wise H & T lawyers, since legally they should have warned me the moment either of my grand-mothers had died, but the inept bastards kept silent until now."

The as yet unnamed CSIS director spoke in soft, firm tones; "Our services have recovered the paper
originales from archival in Toronto where the procedure was accomplished. They are valid and legally binding, especially since his entire family holds bi-nationality since F.H.Wise down to him. As such, he does not have to undergo either a refugee tribunal, nor an investor-immigrant process. We have already directed the appropriate bureaucrats to emit the updated visas, passports, social insurance, medical insurance, and also the military contractor & CSIS security clearance required for his UEO jobs."

Prime Minister Trudeau was not amused, nor was he in the mood to let things slide anymore. The white skinned man was pallid, with large dark blue bags under his eyes that showed the depth of his fatigue. The fresh-pressed 3-piece suit and professionally coiffed hair could not hide the drain on his health that the situation had inflicted upon him in the last five days.

"I will be directing the ministry of Justice and the Canadian Bar Association to investigate these criminal negligences and systematic derelictions of duty on the part of these lawyers and their cabinets. There is no way that any of these acts are legal, ethical or moral. And I can assure you that they will face charges for their imbecilic secrecy having caused a ruckus amongst the immigration and refugee evaluation departments of our government. I will not let this pass in silence! Whomever are the idiots that installed this mentality of keeping secrets could be at least charged with trying to defraud the legal Heir of their client's Trust Fund, so we will investigate that as the starting point, then move on from that to filtrate the rest."

Lucas huffed in clear disbelief, gracing Trudeau with a look of abject contempt as he snarked aloud "Are you really going there? As the living, and very much mentally stable and capable client of said Trust and lawyers, I refuse to allow you any investigation into their offices or client files pertaining to my person, holdings, businesses or employees. If you want to start up a Trump-like inquisition the way the mullet-topped criminal tried against the FBI, you'll need to get a court warrant then convince me that it will be good for me, on top of all the legal wranglings. I can foretell that you will not find me easily convinced of your politically motivated assertions. After all, you were toying with the idea of refusing me not only refugee status, but investor-immigrant status as well, despite all the money and jobs I maintain in Canada already. I know the Wise H & T lawyers are corrupt, lying little mongrels, but they belong to me. You, on the other hand, are just a run-of-the-mill dishonest politos trying to kick me out of my own homes and companies so you can nationalize them, then sell them to your unseen friends who are waiting for it, in the antechambers of Power, so you can get your kickback. It won't be happening, mostly because I'll exterminate your government before you sign the orders. You can use Trump, the churches and Shay Mosley's sect as object lessons to see the gamut of options I have."

There was a collective intake of breath from the conference attendees, as nobody had ever so publicly and crassly accused Justin Trudeau of corruption, depravity, conspiracy and attempt to use his post to commit fraud and extortion. The man was reputed as 'clean' among the political class of North-America, and throughout much of the world. For this young boy to point the finger of accusation at the older man like this meant that things were seriously off-kilter by now.

Lucas gulped his tepid tea in one swallow, slamming the empty cast iron cup on the glass tabletop, making an alarming noise as it connected with the tablecloth that covered it. Thankfully, the tempered safety glass slab held, but still...

Wearing a sneer of contempt, the boy snarled "Since we're on the subject of legalities, you can open the second packet of files to see WHY nobody will be charging me with anything concerning Mosley's well deserved extermination. Those are a pair of 'Black mission briefs', or death warrants, as emitted to me by the directors of DXS and NCIS, who happen to be on screen with us. My actions were not only permitted, they were ordered under a paid para-military & para-policing contract that links Wolenbahn Electronics and WAC's, with their agencies for a variety of services,
supplies and data gathering. So take your amateurish attempts at punting my skinny pale ass in juvie and shove it!"

Smiling a bratty shit eating grin at the multiple groans, grunts and growls of dismay coming from some adults on screen, the young man finished his salvo against their plans for his life. "You will find in the third set of files, the reason WHY you can’t compel me to do anything, not even on account of my age, not even to assign a legal guardian, tutor or parentalist what-ever-the-fuck you were planning. It is an interesting piece of rather old paperwork, dating back to the early 1930's, back when Franklin Henry Wise had just taken leadership of the conglomerate, and the family at the same time. It is a secret, classified, military & secret service contract that binds WAC’s with the governments of both the USA and Canada, as a supplier of services, materials and informations. This quite amusingly includes the research, development, testing and commercializing of weapons to arm the two nations in case a reprise of World War I were to happen. Which, you know, it did in fact happen."

Giving the assembled adults a wide smile full of teeth, the teenager expounded "Please note that the contracts stipulate that the head of WAC’s is referred to as the 'Civilian Constable – Governor of the Riverine Interdiction Citadels of Sault-Sainte-Marie and Sarnia', with afferent capacities, powers and authorities being detailed in the joined annexes of the contract. In other words, my good people, I am the holder of legally established civilian and military authority over two borderline outposts set between Canada and America. This includes DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY in both countries, a rank equal to a 1-star general, and a legislative position equal to a state governor or provincial prime minister for the purposes of daily management."

Sneering again, the boy griped "You can thank my dearly departed great-grand-father for having negotiated that little piece of legalistic nightmare, then having the idiotic idea of hiding it under a rock at the bottom of the Saint-Mary river. Again, I only learned of this little nugget of poisonous 'Wise-dom' yesterday, when the bloody lawyers decided to spill their sacks of malice."

After blinking at the boy owlishly for a few seconds, Andrea Dre exclaimed "You have got to be kidding me! Nobody sane or competent would ever do a contract like this! It has to be a fake! Trudeau! Do something, you weak-willed ninny! Make something happen! Now!" she ended shrieking as she lost all control of her patience and faculties.

Again, the CSIS director spoke firmly, but loudly enough to be heard over the commotion made by the UEO's secretary general as she experienced a melt-down. "It's true, legal, and still valid. We recovered the paper originals from the vaults in Sault-Sainte-Marie's town hall, in Ontario's parliamentary vaults, and in Ottawa's vaults for classified military secrets. The contract has several publicly acknowledged parts that grant vast lands with specific zoning and usages in several places along the borderlines, plus several secret / classified military parts. The part about the 'Constable – Governor' title, rank and authority is in there, with a lengthy description of why that particular hybrid position was created."

The unnamed agent of CSIS elaborated in a monotone voice "It appeared that doctor Wise was well acquainted with several senior officers of the German military and intelligence branches from the early 1920's, many of which were amongst the founders of the Nazi movance later on. As such, he was seen as a vital source of science, technology, medicines, and also foreign human-sourced information. This allowed the man to weasel his way into the good graces of several preeminent politicians of the epoch, to the point where he made himself invaluable. So much so that the military and secret services of the day in both countries saw a real value in elevating his person and companies the way they did, to insure a steady flow of reliable espionage, research and new weaponry that potential troublemakers in Europe or elsewhere could only dream of. I can assure all of you; that contract is real, legally binding, and still very much in effect since none of the obligations
incumbent upon WAC's have ever been defaulted."

The high-level spy finished with "If anything, it is Canada and the USA who have defaulted repeatedly on their parts of the deal, including by never insuring that the Heir of Wise H & T had a healthy, safe and happy life until his age of majority. There are clauses in the contract, pertaining to the inheritance system put in place by doctor Wise for the Trust Funds and companies, including several methods by which his future Heir could be emancipated as young as 10 years of age, if needed. And wouldn’t you know, but killing or maiming in defense of self or another is one of those methods. Incorporating his own company then accruing enough profit from it that he has a livable salary and pays taxes on each of salary, dividends and corporate revenues is another. And so on..."

Hetty Lange spoke up in the dead silence that followed the small speech by the canadian spymaster. "Well, for the part of NCIS and the USA's policing apparatus as it stands, I am declaring that we recognize the validity, legality, and legitimacy of doctor Lucas Wolenczak's position as the lawful Heir of F.H.Wise, and thus his inheritance of all entailed. As such, he is now the 'Constable – Governor' in charge of protecting a long tract of the northern borderline between our nations, something which he has already done admirably yesterday when he plugged that bloody hole in the side of Lake Erie."

Mathilda Webber assented immediately "For the part of the US Department of External Services, and the US intelligence and counter-espionage agencies still active, we concur. As such, we welcome our colleague the 'Constable – Governor' at the table during all talks concerning the national and environmental security of North-America."

Andrea Dre was about to blow a gasket when admiral William Noyce stipulated aloud the same thing, making his old friend of decades, captain Nathan Bridger, look at him as if he had just sold his soul in a flea market barter for stale peanuts. The fact that Iegor Desdenski of the World Bank assented the previous declarations made the blond woman rabid. When Justin Trudeau confirmed the findings as well, thus killing off her lofty secret plans, she flew into an apoplectic rage and slammed the link shut, thus closing off the conference on all lines at the same time.

Turning towards the senior CSIS agent sitting at his dining table, the young scientist said brattily "Well, that went well. The ending wasn't very professional, but after the planet collapsed between her fingers like it did in the last week, I can understand that Andrea was tired beyond her few wits. She's just a politician, after all, and she's blond on top of things... It wasn't like we could expect much from her to begin with..." he snarked good and hard, getting nothing but an eye roll and a snort from the adult.

Bah! The fact the Canadian spies had no sense of humor was irrelevant; he had finally shut up the morons who wanted to enslave him, and that left him with the rest of his life to plan out from now on. Which meant he could now focus on taking in hand that damned wild beast of a conglomerate that his bastard ancestor had left him, with all the secrets and atrocities entailed. Oh, joy!

The floatplane flight east

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 14:00pm
Western America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 11:00am
Canada, over several western provinces
Lucas Wolenczak stood calmly in the office of the Daleminton Hotel's senior management, trying again to establish a permanent business relationship with the company before he left. He was still dressed the same as this morning with all the electronics wired in place, except for some new winterized hiking boots, which were a necessity when traveling through the Canadian landscape in late December. If the plane had to stop, stalled or fell, leaving any survivors stranded, his indoor sneakers would see his feet frostbitten inside of an hour, and him dead soon after.

His new winter trench coat was draped over the swivel chair next to him, with the new hat, new gloves and new scarf all piled on the seat. His work satchel was on the ground, pushed against the base of the chair. He was leaning on his armament-cane with both hands, idly waiting for the older woman, general manager Misses Allegra Lucarno, to finish reading through the final written version of the request he had given her earlier this morning. He was unconsciously rubbing his right thumb over the large gaudy gold ring adorning his left middle finger, eyes vacant as he stared into emptiness as his mind was occupied with planning the trip-long meeting he would endure with the three lawyers that came from Sault-Sainte-Marie to bolster his position against, well, everybody.

Except themselves; the bastard lawyers thought they had him by the 'nads and could squeeze to their vicious unbeating hearts' content. The adolescent planned to show them what happened to people who mistook him for a dupe or an easy victim to abuse. The example of his father and tutors should have warned them, or at least Trump's fall and the eradication of thousands of churches, but noooo... Some people just lived inside a magical world, inside their heads, where bad things only happened to others or their enemies, never them. These cads would get a reality check post haste, then Lucas and Luxis would have peace and safety inside the borders of their shared demesne.

The alternate possibilities implied genocidal techniques that he was fast approaching the point of considering them legitimate, especially if the populations targeted were worshipers or fanatics.

Seated at the desk next to his immobile form, nervously reading through the document one last time before signing it, the hotel's manager was perfectly unaware of the dark meanders of her best client's mind. Presently, she was actually simply relieved that she would have positive news for the owners, after all the messes that happened in the last week. As if learning one of their mid-rank managers running drugs, gambling and prostitution out of their officially empty rooms wasn't enough on its own, there had been the man's gruesome death, the fake cop accomplice discovered, and now the army and CSIS inside the walls. The owners were making an act of understandable mental self-preservation by studiously ignoring EVERYTHING that went wrong outside the hotel complex; they already had enough to deal with without adding the troubles of the city, country and world on top. This piece of good, comprehensive business would settle many weary souls once they were apprised of it.

Swiveling her chair towards her silent guest, Misses Lucarno smiled gratefully at the young genius who was trusting them with so much, despite all the messes that had happened in their care. "Doctor?" he called softly, to avoid startling him. She knew the cane was a weapon, and had been warned by CSIS not to approach the teenager too closely when he was asleep or lost inside his vast, elusive mind as he could have a bad reaction that resulted in defensive gestures out of the instinctual need to protect himself.

"Doctor Wolenczak? Are you with me?" she quipped playfully twice more before the young man blinked his dark flint-blue eyes at her interrogatively.

"Ah, there you are. I thought you had fallen asleep on your feet." the elder woman teased him gently as he raised his right hand to his mouth to cover a loud yawn with his closed fist. Seeing his gesture, she couldn't help herself with another small jest at his expense; "considering you're the one with multiple doctorates who teaches seminars at Stanford, I should be the one to yawn during the lecture,
not you."

Groaning in dismay at having been set up for that one by his own prodigious life, the younger male graced the adult with a mock glare before shaking his entire body awake so as to get some feelings back in his legs and hips where all his weight had settled. "I will have you know, Madam, that my seminars are so impressive and important that nobody would dare fall asleep during my presentation, not even the narcoleptic patients. Or the overly tired interns looking for which specialization to pursue. I'm just that good. You must have had some pretty bad teachers in your youth to compare me so disparagingly to those experiences."

Snorting in amusement, the manager signed the quotation, order forms and prepayment agreement before handing the stamped copies over to her preferred client to date in her long career. "There you go, my good doctor. A 12 month reservation for two suites, side-by-side, the #204 and #202, with the maintaining of all your services and utilities in number 204 as per the existing agreement for the present month. We will be glad to house your business and employees as long as you will want to trust us with them." she declared amiably, since she was truly happy with the lucrative deal. The fact that each month would be paid in full via wire transfer 5 days before it started was even better since there was no credit card company involved and no bill to try to have paid once the client left the premises as many dishonest clients involved and no bill to try to have paid once the client left every year.

Humming softly, the teen looked the pages over, just to verify they matched what he had submitted to her yesterday via email. Seeing no modifications, he folded the sheets and put them in his work satchel alongside his portable workstation and temporary identification papers emitted by CSIS this morning after they had verified the 'revelations' of what were supposedly 'his' lawyers from SSM. "It's me who thanks you and the owners of the Daleminton for allowing my continued presence inside your walls, Madam Lucarno. After all the problems I brought to your doorstep, they and you would have been morally legitimate in deciding to ask for my departure. You have my gratitude for your continued hospitality towards my self and my dependents," the pale skinned boy spoke firmly with a genuine conviction she had rarely seen in anyone his age. Then again, she had rarely seen anyone like him in any age group, so that was par for the situation at hand.

Continuing, Lucas asked "Do you have all the contacts and coordinates in case of technical troubles or legal matters? I have retained the services of the local law firm in permanence for the next five years, and given them a mandate to meet with you at least once a month to make certain no damages to your hotel structure, employees or guests have occurred. If they do not follow through with these meetings, please notify my central administrators, at Wise A&C offices in Buffalo and the industrial hub in Sault-Sainte-Marie. I will then correct the situation so that you not have to suffer the dishonesty or ineptitude of my external contractors."

Smiling gently, Madam Lucarno shook her head sideways, sighing as she contemplated the young man who was fast digging himself a comfy spot in her heart without even trying to. It was such a pity all her grand-daughters were already married and the great-grand-children weren't born yet. She would have introduced him to her kin and made certain he was married to her blood before the year 2021 was ended. Oh, well... A poor grand-mother can dream, can't she?

"Everything is alright on our side of things, doctor. All the administrative and emergency contacts have been filed, and we will keep the solid paper copy in each archived client file relevant to your person, employees and businesses, just as you suggested. Given the current instabilities and occasional outages in both Internex and electricity, that is actually a good suggestion for all our supply chain as well as our other guests. Thank you for reminding me. Also, I have taken your suggestion from last evening to heart. The owners thought it interesting as well. Therefore, we have sent our professional shopper in town to scour the antiquities shops for old hand-cranked mechanical
cash registers and accountant's calculators. These will make a nice addition to the permanent décor at our customer service points and allow us to stay open for business when the outages strike the area. We have also decided to order anew employee time-sheets and benefits claims forms pre-printed on 4-ply carbon paper as we had used for so many decades until the year 2000 bug forced us to change all the computers. With such processes in place, you can rest assured that your patronage will be welcome for a long time to come.” she explained, quite pleased with the results.

Nodding in sympathy and approval, the young man put on his scarf and long coat, the hat and gloves already stuffed in the deep side pockets, as he was wont to do with his winter or rain clothes. He put his satchel's bandoleer over his head to strap it across his chest to spread the heavy weight at his left side hip correctly, grasping his cane in his right hand for the long road. Now set for the trip over to the northern part of Vancouver Harbor to join his plane, Lucas gave Madam Lucarno a soft shy smile that he rarely showed anymore.

"I offer you my best wishes for the holidays and hopes for a much better, safer, and saner New Year 2021. Mazel Tov, Madam Lucarno. We shall cross paths again soon, I hope. I enjoyed my brief stay, and hope to return to really vacation properly in peace when I come back to the area. Until then, I will think of you kindly."

Not really waiting for an answer, the young man opened the office's glassed door to reveal a quad of WAC's guards wearing thick winterized combat clothing, enclosed helmet, ankle-length trench coats in a shade of charcoal black, with several knives, hatchets, a pair of heavy semi-automatic pistols in underarm holsters, and a long-barreled Winchester rifle with telescope, vari-cam optics, fixed bayonet, laser pointer under the muzzle, and a pair of intense LED lamps. The private security (soldiers) were allowed to have such heavy weapons, even in public, due to the old 1930's contracts that gave a pseudo-governmental status to the company, and specifically its owners. As the much vaunted 'Constable – Governor' of the mid-line border, Lucas was entitled to armored protection through devices as much as through human hands, which now included his armament canes and multiple other systems he used. It also grand-fathered everything he had ever used, or done, back to the day he was born since the simile-diplomatic status he had inherited had never been 'dormant' regardless of the damned lawyers' attempts to defraud him.

Marching loudly and forcefully across the hotel's ground floor through clients, waitstaff, canadian soldiers on guard duty, and even the few reporters who had zeroed-in on the Daleminton as the epicenter of all the mess humanity was undergoing, their impressive display had people moving out of the way almost at a run. Proceeding down the central corridor, the small convoy of five passed the restaurant, public restrooms, laundry & dry cleaner, and the large gift shop before emerging in the rear lobby, with the fresh open air beyond the thick glass doors beckoning them. As they left the building, the weather was now incredibly beautiful since the morning snow storm had ceased. The air was crisp and clean if quite chilled, the sunlight coming down brightly almost like late April rather than any December Lucas had ever lived, and many birds could be heard chirping in the forested wild lands around the hotel. The teenager took a few moments to stand still on the rear sill of the complex, breathing in some much needed fresh air and light, before he was entombed in mechanized transports for hours on end yet again.

Sometimes, the boy wondered if going back to horse-drawn stagecoaches wouldn't be better for the health of the travelers, as much as it was speculated to be good for the horse farmers and environment around the coach routes. Sighing in regret about his life and what it was doing to his emotional health as much as his physical body, the young genius started moving again, aiming for the long pine green limousine that the Daleminton owners had put at his disposal for his short trip. Getting seated properly after taking off his satchel so the bandoleer didn't accidentally twist around his neck during travel, Lucas noted idly that three guards sat in the back habitat with him while the other sat in the passenger position up front. Once all doors were closed and seat-belts cinched, one
guard tapped the side of his helmet which had his partner in front signal the driver to move.

(Adrian Von Ziegler – Ad Mortem)

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 16:00pm
Western America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 13:00pm
Canada, over several western provinces

The roadway trip from the hotel was short since the large floatplane had landed in Vancouver's northern harbor then used it's engines to pull itself to a sparsely used commercial pier where the occasional private ferry, smaller floatplanes and helicopters disembarked passengers for the local companies. The Daleminton had the right to use the pier as they paid for a right-of-usage on yearly basis so the Wise Apothecary & Chemists' large 4-propeller aircraft wasn't out of place, even if it was visually impressive.

The pier was nearby on the mouth of the Capilano river, on the southern side, but the drive took 30 minutes because of a few bothersome traffic lights. They left the hotel parking lot, turning once to reach Taylor Way heading south, across the Marine Drive highway, then turning east on Taylor Way's causeway to cross the Capilano river, then south into the commercial district, rolling along the elevated Lions Gate Bridge Roadway, not far from the U-Haul warehouses where Lucas had stashed his four new tool trucks. Then the car turned west towards the Capilano river, aiming for the completely industrial sector of the zone. Passing along the train tracks and heavy industries, the clean green limousine was an odd sight for the industrial zone, but nobody asked any questions since the large golden Daleminton logos on each side showed ownership easily enough, and the car's left turn towards the fenced private pier and large plane told the rest. What few workers had to be on the job on this day, barely two days from Christmas Eve, were more interested in their lunch or blabbing with colleagues about the gifts they purchased, or couldn't afford, than gossiping about the rich folk with the wacky foggy plane.

The massive 150 foot long hull by 200 foot wingspan vehicle was another work of Franklin Henry Wise's absolute confidence in modern steam for all motorized applications. The closed-circuit vapor plumbing needed to add only 1 cup of fresh water every 1,000 miles it flew, floated or rolled. Unlike old fashioned steam locomotives, all the vapor exhausts were piped to return the water steam back to the kettles. Each return pipe connected to a 'condenser' which was a piece of technology every distiller of alcohol who had seen a 'still' had known about for several millenia but which had become used in industrial mechanics only since the early 1900's. Those condensers were what allowed the engine to operate with less fuel and a small reserve of liquid water to top off the kettles automatically when needed. Despite all the mechanical wonders, the plane still had several safety valves poking out from the central roof and atop each of the four engine housings in case the vapor over-boiled so that the plumbing didn't explode. Running on water heated at 400 degrees Celsius then pressurized at 1,200psi was just asking for a catastrophe if the on-board crew weren't meticulous about operations and maintenance.

As the green car accosted the seaplane's gangplank, the pilots initiated the enormous engines, each machine having twelve rows of four pistons to power the 30 foot diameter 6-blade wooden propellers that were on the front and back of each power plant. All eight huge fans augmented speed slowly, giving the passengers time to climb aboard without getting blown/sucked off the plank, then letting the poor soldiers pull in that boarding plank without endangering them. Once the side door facing the pier was closed, the green limousine rolled away somewhat quickly, as if the driver was in a hurry to leave the area for his own safety, the rubber tires screeching against the snow covered cement dock.

In a great plume of hot smoke that made it look like a living fog bank skimming atop the frigid
waters of Vancouver Harbor's outlet, the exquisitely crafted private flying boat gunned its engines, suddenly doubling the RPM's on all drive shafts, yanking the large ship away from the pier on a heading true-east. Rapidly, the vehicle's four motors geared up to full lift-off torque, making the wooden hull and the air around it creak with noises and wet hot steam. The ship passed under the highly elevated Lions Gate Bridge to enter the vast harbor waters properly, planning to use the shipping lane as runway to effectuate the takeoff. Like an old dragon of legends emerging from the clouds to hunt prey, the great machine belched one last blast of clear white fog as it lifted off at the end of it's 3,000 feet run, quickly ascending so it could clear the urban skyline of East-Vancouver and pass the valley through the Rocky Mountains afterwards. Roughly ten minutes after takeoff, the plane was flying into the white cottony cloud ceiling that wreathed the Rockies at this period of the year, and another ten minutes saw them coasting just above the clouds, at some 22,000 feet in the air, where the pilots leveled off.

Seated in the Lord's Chair in the passenger cabin, Lucas glared malevolently at the three elderly lawyers that had been sent by Sault-Sainte-Marie in response to the legal and social problems that could negatively impact the company. THE COMPANY! Not HIM as a person, as a doctor, as a businessman, or as the actual legal Heir of the Wise Heritage & Trust. No! The fat rat bastards had reacted only because the planetary situation had degenerated to the point their preciously pampered posteriors were on the line! They could lose their salaries, benefits, pensions, and even the company houses if the entire conglomerate collapsed, therefore saving the skinny runt in actual charge of everything had become a vital necessity, not something they truly wanted.

In other words, if there hadn't been a planet-wide implosion of the economy but rather just a civil war in the USA, the bloody fucking apostolates of betrayal would have left him to trudge through the entire mess with the Canadian immigration officials, even once they found out he had an active citizenship file for 15 years.

"we have a PROBLEM, gentlemen." the teenager informed the three elderly, white, anglo-germanic men with a nasty sneer of contempt etched on his handsome angular face. "Somebody... Several somebodies in fact... Have taken the liberty of hiding my inheritance and the full extension of the Wise Conglomerate from ME, the lawful Heir and sole stockholder. That stops now, and I want immediate revelation of everything. We have a flight of 7 hours in front of us to get it done properly."

Seeing the refractive, uncooperative faces of his employees, the adolescent stood from his plush swivel chair and brought his left hand to his cane, under the sculpted pommel section. A quick twist & turn had the sword part leaving the lower barrel, the spring-loaded quillons opening wide upon release from their constraints just as the pike blade on the lower end of the barrel opened similarly. Aiming the revealed sword and pike at the faces of the three treasonous aggressive adults, Lucas triggered the entire weapon to glow with bio-neural energies, creating a blue-silver haze around the items that crawled up his hands to his wrists.

"As my hateful, spiteful bastard of a great-grand-father would have said in this circumstance: 'Arbeit macht frei, untermensch ratten!' (Work will set you free, subhuman rats!) And it's true, lying rats! Working for me will free you. Free you from old debts you still owe. Free you from potential legal actions by the governments or me. But above all, it will set you free from my violent, inhumane ANGER. Choose wisely, for I have seven long hours in which to explain that angry inhumanity, and many long years to demonstrate it materially once we reach Sault-Sainte-Marie. The vaults under the complex are vast, deep, and armored enough to dampen the damages and sounds of aerial bombardments, so muffling your scream will not be an effort for me."

Giving his left hand a small shake, the boy made the large gaudy ring on his middle finger unlatch, letting the ornate faceplate pivot open to display the sculpture inside. It was a panel of white natural
nacre, or pearl matter, upon which had been engraved and inlaid a Swastika, the Nazi Cross, in black opal with red ruby borders all along the cross limbs and the perimeter of the white field where it met the gold rim. When all three men looked at the hidden crest gobsmacked, the young man spoke in flawless German with a snobbish, disdainful tonality, declaring coldly "Zieg Heil, schergen! Ihr Anführer war auferstanden!" (Salute the crown, minions! Your leader is risen!)

As the three elderly men stood unsteadily to their feet and placed their left hand over their heart in salute, responding in German as well, Lucas cursed silently in his mind his ancestor, grand-parents, parents, and even his own self. These debased little errors of Nature hadn't come to his rescue, let alone his service, because they hadn't been convinced he was a good little Nazi-in-training like what they dreamed of seeing back in power over the world. Fuck! They were probably closeted Trump supporters to boot! What other crimes had they been hiding all these years? They would suffer for this depravity! It would take time to finagle the information out of their foul lying carcasses, then arrange a series of discrete heart attacks or food poisonings, but it would happen.

In due time; no later.

To them, and to each and every one of their damned cult-spawned acolytes. Lucas would not tolerate that a single one of these blasted deniers of human dignity and personhood continue to exist. It would take time, patience, and much effort, but unfortunately for them, Lucas had toiled on far worse and far more complicated situations than mere sequential assassinations. The art of the thing lay in the scheduling of proper workmen for the correct targets, then the rest happened naturally.

It wasn't his first contract for the death or disappearance of a human or device, in case you wondered.

The young male would endure the next seven hours of hellish ass-kissing from the delusional elderly crones who thought that the only reason he had waged war against Trump's White Regency was because the mullet-topped geriatric fool had tried to have him killed first. Neither of them seemed to think that wanting to exterminate jews, coloreds, women, children, doctors, teachers and so on was any cause for concern or thinking that the whole damned Crusade wasn't a good thing for white Germanic people.

They would suffer.

Oh yes! In due time, they would suffer indeed.

Lucas on vacation; for real this time

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Tuesday 22nd of December, 2020; 23:18pm  
Western America; Tuesday 22nd t of December, 2020; 20:18pm  
Pointe aux Pins, WAC's complex  
Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, Canada

One day and a half before his 16th birthday, after 7 hours of luxurious but bothersome, unpleasant flight with a trio of evil minions verbally sucking his cock and praising his glorious almight all the time, they had finally arrived at the home port. All it took was a few minutes to take down the floatplane to the frigid, snow covered, Saint-Mary's River then guide it into the wide open watergate of the WAC's Riverine Interdiction Citadel perimeter walls. The defensive breakwater walls’ massive
armored steel doors slid laterally to a resounding close behind the aircraft, before it had even reached the maintenance building proper, in order to limit the potential for enemy craft to follow inside the harbor. The floatplane glided at quarter-throttle through the artificial estuary, between the short thick concrete piers with their updated manned CWIS turrets, right into the waiting aeronautics hangar, with the tall armored steel doors sliding laterally after them without waiting for the ship to be fully parked or the propellers stopped.

Once the seaplane was fully parked and moored to the masonry docks, a short half-hour to unload the craft’s rolling supply carts and personnel was all it took for Lucas to finally set foot on solid ground in friendly territory, as he was the very last to leave the plane. He still considered this domain ‘friendly’ but not ‘his’ because of how many secrets, depravities and crimes he yet had to unearth, cleanse and repair before it could ever be considered fully ‘his’ own.

And it wasn’t ‘home’ in any ways.

No; his real permanent ‘home’ was and would always be the Wise Manor in Buffalo, at the ancestral seat of his blood family, regardless of how many troubles his birth kin had inflicted on him.

Still, given the mess happening inside the convulsing remains of the deceased American nation, the teenager could admit that the vast residential and industrial facilities (plus secret military bunkers) of the double-complex spanning ‘Pointe aux Pins’ in Canada and ‘Brush Point’ in America, south & east across the river, would be a sufficient dwelling (sarcastic irony) and forward command post, for the near future. For at least the same period that he had foreseen using the Daleminton hotel, and most logically far longer than that. The complex did have a full size neuroplexic telecom hub & server farm, built as a matched pair with both sides of the estate having hard-connected parts of the sprawling cybernetics system that made Lucas such a formidable opponent in both the virtual and material worlds.

The thousands of ‘civilian’ workers were accompanied by several hundred ‘police’ officers and private ‘soldiers’ that kept the vastly sprawling estate safe against spies, sabotage and petty criminals. As of the day he had been forced to flee San Francisco, Lucas had sent orders across his entire conglomerate to bolster the number of policemen and soldiers in active service. They stalled retirements, recalled still-healthy retirees beneath age 60, increased the intake of young recruits while lowering the minimal age for that sector from 21 years old right down to 16 years old, which was the minimal legal age for a teenager to leave high school without a valid diploma. The combined measures had resulted in almost doubling the roll-call of active fighting personnel serving under his flag, with most concentrated here, in Sarnia, and in Buffalo at the conglomerate HQ.

Maybe, just maybe, he would end up with enough men backing him that the teeming hordes of church-whores and dogs-of-christ would finally leave him alone in peace. If not, the teenager would really have to start putting in practice the sorts of methods he had used on Shay Mosley across large tracts of land to eradicate the worshipping vermins from his life.

Wearing his work satchel on its bandoleer at his left hip, the adolescent doctor gripped his cane in the right hand as he walked off the plane, grateful to finally touch solid ground anew, especially since that liberated him from the accursed presence of the three traitorous lawyers. If the conference he had with them on the trip was any indication, he had to fumigate, scrape clean then rebuild the entire legal division of SSM, and probably the entire conglomerate directorate along with them.

Shaking his head of all the negative thoughts, the boy used his free hand to place the ash gray wide brimmed hat on his head as he walked through the cavernous aeronautics hangar towards the landside cargo doors. On his right, a tall but short, bulky machine covered in riveted steel plates plunked around on thick wide treads, pulling a trailer full of people, parts and tools to work on another
seaplane, similar to the one he had flown in, but this one bore gunnery turrets and sponsons all over the fuselage.

The tracked vehicle was an abomination harkening back to the 1917's when the German ministry of war had created the A7V; an ungainly engine 24' long by 10' wide, and almost 11' tall atop the central command cupola. This noisome, vapor belching version was – what else? – an iteration of that ill-fated device re-invented by his great-grand-father F.H.Wise when he was barely 19 years old. The man had traveled to Europe just after World War I was ended, as a way to develop sales lines for their apothecary and food products because competition was already fierce in America. At the same time, it would allow him to practice first hand his newly learned apothecary and surgical skills on patients who were too poor and desperate to be choosy about who healed them, or what the results were. Anything better than death, dismemberement or handicap easily passed muster back then.

Such was the epoch, as such were the men that made it that horrendous way, careless of the lives and welfare of anyone born, adopted or married in the same exalted social standings, starting with race. And since F.H.Wise held for heroes and role models men such as doctors Guillotin, Nobel and Gatling right alongside Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo or Paracelsus, you can understand just how it was that he became what he turned out to be.

Franklin had concentrated his tourism in Germany, and the neighboring germanophone countries, without really raising any alarms inside the family at the time. It was there that he saw the clunking gray hulk laboring in the ruins of a devastated German village, pulling a decrepit old wooden 4-wheeled ox cart filled with ten heavy jerrycans of diesel fuel and injured peasants who had nothing left but the rags they wore. F.H.Wise had easily bought the blueprints for the machine from disillusioned ministry of defense bureaucrats, then, in his spare time in the evenings, he had redrawn the mechanics while switching everything over to steam engineering instead of a diesel motor. All the flat gunslits were replaced by extruded sponsons and the driver's cupola was made octogonal, higher, fenestrated with clear glass panes and solid steel shutters that rose up from inside the machine to cover them in combat. Instead of just one door in the front, there were now 4; one mid-point each side plus front & back so that many armored tractors could be linked in a chain, like a train. Also, the new design was given innovative retractable adaptor wheels that allowed it to ride railways with train cars attached in lieu of a real locomotive. That rendered this armored mule capable of pulling wagons around a triage yard, or even helping a damaged locomotive deep in the countryside, away from town.

For all its innovations, the modernized machine as a whole was still nasty, brutish, and not all user friendly for the two dozen men that could fill the insides of the armored steel can. However, it was redeemed by the cheapness of the device, the ease of construction with few tools, the easy availability of spare parts for upkeep, and the fact that anybody could learn to use it competently inside of two or three weeks. An ideal little metal monster for a farm owner with a field full of low-education men but very lofty ideas about his station in society, like F.H.Wise had been in 1920.

Or someone like Lucas, who had a civil war knocking on his door but loyal men and ressources rarer than the innumerable mindless peons at the call of the enemy gurus.

That was why he had ordered, during the past week, that all 20 units of this machine that were spread between his many active estates be refurbished to full service as motor-mules to pull trailors or heavy parts for the larger builds they had under construction, also by his standing orders. If worse came to happen, the machines' 25mm steel armor made them into light tanks that could transport police, solders, firemen or search & rescue teams, with functional gunnery in the sponsons all the while pulling a trailer of tools and supplies appropriate for the situation. Yes, these metal tractors were not very intelligently designed compared to modern-day troop transports, but they still easily
compared to an M-113 tracked carrier while having better armor, far more dragging torque, had railway adaptors that made them far more mobile and versatile, and they were amphibious as long as the water didn't pass over the telescoping air intake pipes on the roof.

The second large floatplane Lucas walked by was in fact a good example of that arming program.

The workers were in the process of completing the commissioning of the brand new military vehicle, built of aluminium and steel this time, the design of which Lucas had signed off last year in reaction to the proven need to increase his defensive capacity. There were a couple of Mafia, Triad, Yakuza, Bratva, MS-13, and ISIS-linked pan-african groupuscules that had been nipping at his flanks for the last two years, since his last bad injuries. They had tried to extort his company into supplying them with money or worse; foodstuffs, medicines, even chemicals for explosives and weaponized gas like he used on Mosley. Having a mobile, quick response capacity that could deliver army-grade punches to the enemy's homebases and vehicles independantly of police agencies had become a necessity for survival, and his employees had luckily managed to keep the new builds safely secret up to date.

The Sarnia facilities were equipped differently than SSM, so they were tasked with producing a pair of 200 foot long shallow/brown water warships to help defend the Saint-Laurent Maritime Seaway in its inland portions, between the Buffalo HQ and the network's present end-of-lines in Thunder Bay (Ontario) and Clough Island (Wisconsin). As soon as the small nimble gunboats would leave the drydocks, new builds for exactly the same hulls would be started, and so on thereafter, until four combat floatplanes and eight riverine warships were in service to protect the WAC's ancestral shipping lines over the Great Lakes of North-America. At the same time, the conglomerate would be sending marketing agents down the Saint-Laurent to prospect for wholesalers to sell their products in various Canadian towns and villages, and also purchase lands to build docks, hangars, workshops, and company housing for employees or guests to facilitate all the arduous work. If he had known back then about the special legal position he held, he could have moved more openly about defending his properties and employees' families. He could also have built more and bigger vehicles instead of the small-fry he was saddled with for the coming years. Well, that could now change in earnest, no?

Snort! It would be like redoing the colonization of the Wild West, but in reverse direction.

{ SQ } --- { The feeling of freedom } --- { SQ }

(Adrian Von Ziegler – The Sealed Kingdom)

Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 00:15am - midnight

Lucas had been ferried across the large industrial portion of the complex by a small vehicle crafted to resemble the limousine version of an electric golf cart. It was rather amusing, from his perspective as a learned student of psychology and psychiatry, to see that even in this menial little local transit system, the distinction between function, position, rank, style and title was maintained at all costs, regardless of how questionable the expenditure and effort was. Otherwise, the small, silent, open-cab car looked like it came off a country club's lawn rather than the heavy industrial and military complex surrounding them. And yet, by the very style of build plus the choice of materials, steel, real wood and real leather upholstery, Lucas could see that it had been designed and assembled somewhere inside the WAC's conglomerate specifically for their in-house usage.

It was also funny to look at, like the toy trains in public gardens and amusement parks.

Huffing once in lighter humor at the funny little mahogany covered conveyance, the teenager had let the quad of soldiers guide him to a seat as they arrayed in the other benches of the empty vehicle. It took a special key to start up this particular cart, which one soldier (the team leader) had recovered
from the hangar foreman on arrival. As they zipped around the hangars, manufacturing edifices and
warehouses, the young genius saw other similar vehicles but designed more generically. Some held
two passengers plus minimal cargo in a square basket like a miniature pickup truck, or carried one
worker with a specialized tool on an articulated hydraulic arm for repairs around the compound's
ancient buildings. All in all, it became apparent that the two-sided estate was so vast that the workers,
relatives and guests had no choice but to develop a type of miniature, personalized motor vehicle to
move around, and this was the solution put in place since the late 1960's.

Lucas had no plans to change this, in the contrary. He was already planning to have some fun
driving one of these around his property to tour it properly this time around, and maybe even just for
leisure, like a Sunday driver type of relaxing activity. If everything went well, he could even have
more built to spread the concept to his other properties to increase production while also training kids
for driving jobs or making small light-weight, low cash-value deliveries instead of older adults.
Things like grocery bags, pharmacy orders, small tools or construction materials from the hangars
over to the fields, etc... This could help him lower the age of work-ability, and thus the minimal
hiring age, from 16 down to 11, when secondary schooling normally began. With the societal crisis
in progress, many parents would prefer to have their kids working for a salary, earning their keep and
helping the household, instead of wasting time on schooling they wouldn't use or didn't want
anyways. Given that both Canada and the USA were under martial law presently, he might get away
with it, or maybe those special laws that made him 'Constable – Governor' granted him special
capacities, like deputizing people for a militia, or hiring anybody under the 'National emergency'
justification. In either case, these small cars, burning fuel alcohol in a steam engine, were maxed out
at 30 miles per hour, which was the speed of a running horse or a very fast 10-speed bicycle. Since
kids already had that speed available on a bike, it shouldn't be problematic, at least as long as they
stayed on WAC's territory. Lucas could guess that on public lands, they would become subject to the
same laws as mopeds or golf carts, and the minimal age for driving those was 14, with the user
obliged to have a specific license too.

There was one good point of having an open-topped car; he could see all around the night sky
unimpeded, and smell the fresh woody odors of the area instead of stale felt and Lysol sprays that
were so common to modern sealed cars. This was helping him realize just how real it was, that he
had finally managed to escape from the ravenous grasping clutches of the ecclesiastes and corrupt
politos that had worked so long and hard on trying to destroy his person, life, and everything he had
built with his own hands. Looking up to the few white clouds and luminous moon in the sky, a
sentiment of peace began to seep into his mind, for once making him feel truly able to lower his
guard and redirect his energies towards healing his injuries and infections instead of being war-ready.

Lowering his gaze in front of the small decorative car, Lucas could see between the industrial
buildings a new set of walls, taller and much older than the outer perimeter defenses that surrounded
the working portions of the complex. This elderly structure made of old brown bricks and steel
framing even had a fully covered walkway with thin, tall, murder slits every ten feet and
machicolations supporting the overhanging portions of the enclosed patrol corridor. There were
medium-sized square corner towers, medium-sized square towers at regular points of each side, large
rectangular gate-keeps capable of passing a full one-level train wagon as evidenced by the rails
embedded in the pavement cobblestones, and smaller half-turrets standing above postern doors that
served for guards & dogs to exit the grounds to patrol the foot path at the base of the wall, at water
level. The entire place was surrounded by a 40 foot wide wet moat, dug down a good 20 feet
beneath street level, with a yard wide path on each side, and functioning drawbridges spanning the
defensive navigable canals at each gate-keep.

No wonder it had been called an 'interdiction citadel' in the early 1900's.

This architectural throwback to the feudal lords of the Middle-Ages was the actual manorial estate of
the Wise Family for the Pointe-Aux-Pins region of Sault-Sainte-Marie, and the management hub of this portion of the estate in Canada. It was matched by its exact twin structure across the Saint-Mary river in Brush Point, the American portion of the vast industrial and military complex. There, inside these old, weather-worn walls, stood 1 square kilometer of manicured lawns for parties, gardened greenhouses for food & medicines, a few barns for the household's edible livestock, a stocked horse stable, and the household car garage added in the 1940's. Dwarfing them all were the vast manor with its many gothic – industrial wings that loomed hauntingly in the night's shadows, and in the back of the plot near the river, the original industrial mechanics workshop with water access via open-air canal through the surrounding moats and the rest of the working canals across the property.

As the small 'toy' limousine passed the drawbridge and main gate-keep without problems from the soldiers on guard duty, Lucas was able to see that most of the manor's windows were dark as it was the depth of night. Despite the late hour, a small reception party was waiting for him on the elevated front porch of the central wing, the public zone where guests were received for business or mundane entertainment. This was very much the style of construction and setting social classes in stone that characterized the grand old European manors of the 1800's and early 1900's, when entitled nobles still had enough money and societal clout to live out their pretensions of grandeurlavishly, just before the Great Depression had collapsed the planet's economics in the gutter.

And it was all HIS from now on, regardless of what churches, governments or corrupt lawyers said.

{ SQ } --- { Homecoming } --- { SQ }

(Two Steps From Hell - Starsky)

Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 00:45am

With barely one day left before his 16th birthday, Lucas Wolenczak finally set foot inside his own household, relatively 'safe' for the time being. After he had disembarked the small 8-seat car with his four escorts, he climbed the masonry stairs to the receiving balcony. There, an elderly white man in his late seventies, almost bald with wrinkled skin, rheumy green eyes and a slightly bowed back, walked slowly to stand forward of the waiting group. The remainder of the assembled persons were clearly some of the manor's valets, maids, janitors and guards, all easily recognizable by the traditional black & gold uniforms used by such employees in other manorial estates for nigh on three centuries.

Bowing low at the wait, the elderly gentleman announced "Greetings and well met, Lord of the Manor, Heir of Wise. I am Erasmus Fiddley Chadderton, appointed Majordomo for this manor and Seneschal of the House, for both sides of the estate. I bid thee welcome back to your lands, My Lord. Your last visit five years ago was far too short to be proper, and far too encumbered by lawyers and accountants to discuss the deeper, more private aspects of the House affairs. I do hope that now, we will have sufficient time to confer upon such matters, as they are pressing."

Gesturing to a young white male with brown hair and eyes dressed in a better style of valet uniform, the majordomo explained "This is my grand-son, Raphael Luther Chadderton. He is the appointed Master's butler for the present. I do hope that his services will prove adequate to your needs, My Lord, else we will find a suitable servant for the position henceforth. He will guide you to the Lord's suite and office, in the high tower at the back of the manor, and will see to the valets serving you any meals, drinks, or the usual necessities of habitation you require. He is also the person who will pass on your orders to the rest of the household staff, unless you wish to emit these instructions directly to me during our meetings. Any shopping, purchases or deliveries you require will be processed through him and his subordinate waitstaff, as that is their reason for being retained. As a measure for
your personal security, it is important that as many outside purchases as possible be processed through the estate's mail room and baggage handlers, or else trapped or poisoned parcels could reach inside the complex to cause mischief. Is there anything else that I can do for you, My Lord?"

Lucas looked up at the manor's grandiose masonry façade which he had barely spied the first time he had visited the site, almost five years back. That visit had been so fast, like a whirlwind really, as he only had the short weekend to come here then return to Stanford, under the uninterested eyes of the Young Prodigies' Program. Besides the fact he had still been recovering from the attack committed by his father and hired goons, the WAC's H & T lawyer of the time had not been in the mood to let the 10 year old prodigy child look at anything. He forced Lucas to focus only on the raw accounting ledgers, going so far as to sit right besides him to use the mouse and keyboard to control the spreadsheets and product catalogs on the screen as he explained the workings of the sprawling complex in tersely sparse concepts that allowed him to hide anything criminal he wanted to obfuscate.

Things would be soo different now.

Tapping his cane's lower end on his right boot, Lucas shook his head sideways in the negative, still admiring the enormous building that mixed cut-block stones, bricks, concrete, and steel girders for the balconies and the frames of the windows and doors. His ancestors had good taste back then. Even Franklin Henry Wise had been a damn good architect & engineer, on top of being a bloody fine apothecary, surgeon and biochemist for his day. Then again, all his male ancestors had on all the sides of the family tree had fancied themselves 'renaissance men' and 'enlightened', so that explained a lot of why they had built so many of these 'old glories' across North-America.

Marching up the last short flight of heavy ornate stone stairs to the gilded front doors, Lucas spoke aloud "A hot meal not interrupted by lawyers, notaries, accountants and politos will be a welcome change from the rest of this damnable week. Then a hot bath and some sleep in a warm cushy bed with a late rise in the morning." Activating the clock display in his meta-glasses to see the time, the young man griped "I'll be going abed near 03:30am after all that, so I don't want to be roused before noon. Besides, I'm not religious; bloody fucking christmas isn't my family's original faith tradition anyways, so why should I care about it? I'll wake up late, have a good hearty brunch then celebrate my birthday with a late dinner. Maybe I'll even go out in town for it since, apparently, I can still afford small pleasures like that." he added sarcastically as he gestured his left hand to encompass the giant manorial estate with the busy working edifices beyond the walls.

With those last words, the adolescent genius walked across the lintel of his inherited house, escorted by the silent form of the young butler who walked a full pace ahead of his Master to guide him to his apartment, deeply hidden inside the monstrously huge, complex edifice. The newly arrived owner of the household barely heard the massive armored steel doors close, far behind him, when the group of workers had all entered. If he experienced a weird shiver going down his spine and his aching legs at the sound, he paid it no mind, subconsciously assigning the eerie feelings to mental exhaustion from all the lurid things he had learned from the lawyers during the floatplane trip.

{ SQ } --- { PREVIEW ch.10 } --- { SQ }

Lucas passes a calm and restful birthday, then explores the vast sprawling complex of Sault-Sainte-Marie before taking a more direct role in directing the management of affairs for the entirety of his inherited conglomerate. He also receives more detailed information about his legal, societal and political status as 'Constable – Governor' which, as it happens, is no joke to laugh at. He might very
well end up getting screwed by that nightmare job, after all.

In Los Angeles, the DXS and NCIS field teams reunite with loved ones and agencies, which causes a lot of soul searching and sours the mood for the holidays that weren’t going to be festive anyways, no matter who did what this year.

In the Great Eastern Split, the SeaQuest & convoy attempt to keep up their flagging morale as they continue to investigate the exploded ruins and the mapping of the new waterways.

Across the USA and Canada, various individuals who were ignored by the important people, and history in movement, try to survive with varying degrees of success.
Lucas tries to pass a calm and restful birthday while exploring the vast sprawling complex of Sault-Sainte-Marie before taking a more direct role in directing the management of affairs for the entirety of his inherited conglomerate. He receives more detailed informations about his legal, societal and political status as 'Constable – Governor' which, as it happens, is no joke to laugh at. He might very well end up getting screwed by that nightmare job, after all.

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The author wishes to express thanks to anyone who may read his story and encourages them to leave reviews, comments or even flame it hard. As with any who try their hand at publicly expressing an idea or story concept, all feedback is important and welcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own SeaQuest, Star Wars, nor any other sci-fi or fantasy series, movies, comics, cartoons or news items used in this fiction as they belong to the creators or broadcasters or publishers who put them out for consumption by the public.

SeaQuest

Abstract

Lucas knew full well that being sent out of the country on a military boat would only end up with him injured or dead, no matter what lies Lawrence spread around. So Lucas did the logical thing: he packed up and left in the dead of night, leaving behind in public forums incriminating evidence against his bastard father to keep him too busy to hunt him down.

This story takes place before season 1, in the months before the SeaQuest is commissioned out to sea in the period when Lucas was ordered by his father to join the ship without any care for his opinion or general welfare.

This story is Alternate Universe, most characters are OOC and there are several mini-crossovers in the form of cameos and snapshots with the maritime-inspired series NCIS and JAG who are the most
relevant to the situations facing Lucas and the casts of MacGyver (2016), NCIS and Bones will make large appearances. There is a lot of CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, Canadian Mounties and Coast Guard and other multi-varied organizations mentioned along the way. As such, given so many crossovers of equal proportions, I am again placing this in the general SeaQuest section of the fandom since it would not fit in a single sub-genre. My thanks for your tolerance of the situation.

Unlike my other story, "Justice for Lucas", this has absolutely no psionics, magicks or time engines involved even if such things were part & parcel of the SeaQuest canon in all three seasons.

PS; I like flames, they're fun to read so don't hesitate to write them.

{ SQ } --- { } --- { SQ }

All warnings at the beginning of Chapter 3 are repeated verbatim.

For this chapter, time stamps will have America's West & East coast hours.

WHAT IF LUCAS SAID 'NO'?

TENTH CHAPTER; Un-holIdays of late 2020

NCIS home base return

(NCIS LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 11:00am
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:00am
OSP – Spanish House
Los Angeles, California, USA

Taking advantage of the fact the conference chamber next to the operations room was empty until the meeting, Marty Deeks sat back in his chair, letting the backrest take his full weight as he raised his face towards the ceiling, gaze vacant as he was lost inside his tumultuous mind. People would soon be coming in, Hetty having called for an 8:30am post-mission briefing with the full team. That, and they needed to talk about what happened with Mosley and Wolenczak too. Marty sighed despondently as he thought back to the hectic night they had just lived.

The Canadians had packed them up and punted them across the border so damned fast that it was a miracle they had been allowed back at Diefenbaker Airfield to get the DXS jet for the trip. The flight over had been done in the dead of night, passed 23:00pm, short and dreary, with every member of all teams suffering bad cases of fright, anger and melancholy all mixed up. The four hour flight saw them arrive back in their hometown around 4:30am, but they weren't sure they were all that happy about what they were returning home to.

Upon arrival at the John Wayne Airfield in the dead of night, the DXS field agents had taken their
SUV’s back to their own enclave, a small agglomeration of homes and three storey housing blocks that Mathilda Webber had kept under wraps until the lay of the land was fully revealed. The four agents headed into the mountains to meet their families and get some rest for the coming day, which would be hard for them as for everybody else.

Their NCIS colleagues from the New Orleans team had been routed straight off to the National Guard barracks on the airfield site so they could rest before taking a berth on a morning train headed east to Florida. The two agents would share a private sleeper cabin all the way to NOLA where they would disembark. At this point of time, nobody knew for real what the situation in that city was, or if there was any reason to go back left alive anymore.

The Los Angeles team had been hustled back to the OSP’s usual command center in the center of town, the Spanish House, where him and Kensi spent the night. They had shared a small single bed in the basement’s emergency shelters, all night spent cling to each other in fright of what was coming towards them, and gratefulness at being alive. Again, nobody knew what fresh horrors, violence or news of dead friends the day would bring, or if it was worth fighting anymore.

The faux-wood armored double doors opened to let in Sam Hanna who was clearly pissed about something already, and given the man was a genuine SEAL with all the training and expertise, you could just feel that nothing good would come of it. Some unlucky bastard was gonna get his head taken off soon, if the black man’s face was any indicator of events in motion. He stood undecided just inside the room, but Marty knew he’d take the foot of the table as usual. Before the doors got the chance to close, the team of Eric Beale and Nell Jones rushed in, short-stopping right quick before they rammed into Sam’s back, then wisely using a series of quick gestures and facial ticks to decide on sitting away from the angry soldier’s reserved chair, just to be on the safe side of things until he calmed down. As the mechanism was pushing the two panels back together, someone triggered them to stop and open again, letting in Kensi Blye and Henrietta Lange who were walking side-by-side silently, an air of funereal gloom hanging about them.

Hetty took her usual place at the head of the table with the large plasma screen behind her to illustrate the points in her briefing. She set her expensive italian briefcase, covered in brown stallion leather with bronze rivets, on the table besides her to pull out the files and items needed for the conference. As she was finishing her setup, the doors opened again to let in Grisha Callen and Anna Kolchek who were the last people needed for the meeting to proceed.

"Well then," Hetty spoke in her firm but soft tones, "Let's get this shindig on the road. Firstly, I would like to welcome back our agents from their trip up north, despite all the nastiness that resulted in the interim. If you could, mister Deeks, give us the abstracted version of the trip?"

Marty blew a breath out, despondency in each gesture and emotion that showed on his body language as he ran a hand through his long shaggy blond hair. With a long inhale to fortify himself, the young man said without preamble: "It was a booby trap from the start. Not from Wolenczak, that was evident on contact. The kid was open and genuine with everything he said or did. It was the Canadian government that had all of us by the short hairs. They hid from Wolenczak his dual citizenship until they could benefit from keeping him up north, then they admitted his fan-dangled pseudo military title because they absolutely needed to keep him on their side of the border. He learned about that from his lawyers only because some court order from Toronto was overturned, about six hours before we heard it. From then on, we weren't in our jurisdiction anymore, so we came back. Or, more honestly, the beavers punted us out as soon as Diefenbaker could put the plane on the runway."

Hetty blinked owlishly at his story; short & sweet didn't cover the vast gaps and humongous details that weren't being addressed. Steepling her fingers in front of her, the older woman made a face of
professional detachment that was purely artificial, as she tried to determine the mood behind her field agent's sudden blunt aversion to cooperation with her.

"Mister Deeks, while this meeting is indeed called a 'briefing', there is in fact no need for such pronounced lack of detailing in your account. Please expound on the situation." she ordered in her dry sarcastic wit, making a few people smirk or chuckle at her répartie.

Marty wasn't in the mood. He hadn't been in the mood for much of anything since they had left the Daleminton yesterday, and he didn't foresee that changing anytime soon.

"Fine. You want the nitty-gritty minutiae, you'll get it. Cry about it on your time afterwards." the blond policeman griped as his already unstable mood soured fast. "We got on the plane with our 2 colleagues from NOLA and the DXS field agents. We then saw the horrendous displays of the Roseanic chapel live on TV, just before we got up in the air. We spent the flight split in two groups; mine, deep in legalese, and the 'reaction' team that was planning the armed response, in case it got that far. It got that far, but we were already outgamed, outgunned, and not even in the right game anyways, long before we put our feet down in BC. The Canadian and USA Governments had been hiding from Wolenczak his full legal, social and political status since he was born, and his felonious parents were in on it willingly. Because the higher ups had lied to everyone and sundry, we were caught in a crossborder crossfire that had us pinned down on all sides. And it was readily apparent that the beavers most certainly did not want the kid doctor to have access to all that money and industrial capacity. They most assuredly did not want him to know he was legally equal to a state governor or provincial premier, with the ability to write and enact territorial laws. They especially did not want him to know about his judicial role, or his rank equal to a career naval admiral, and they dreaded the day he found out about his diplomatic status."

Deeks made a face of tiredness, passing a hand over his mouth before dropping it back to the tabletop in front of him. "Then, after all that exploded in our first meeting that morning, we saw on TV the nukes kill off DC and crack the continent. Wolenczak kicked us out, then about 15 minutes later had the beavers grab three of us to assist in a project. We later learned that he had decided to plug the leak in the side of Lake Erie all on his own, after somehow bullshitting control of the space stations out of the UEO's hands. That, or he hacked through them like he already owned them, the details are a bit blurry on that, since, you know, nobody told me the backroom stuff. As soon as the new crack in the lake was fixed, all 8 of us were trucked back to Diefenbaker AFB where the canucks locked us in individual debrief rooms to interrogate us for a few hours. We were let go only to be escorted by armed guards straight to the plane and shipped off the runway, back to the US, at flanking speed. The End."

Director Lange nodded minutely as she set her hands palms flat on the tabletop before herself. "The resumé that mister Deeks has just given us may seem somewhat abbreviated but, in fact, is concordant with the statements made by the NOLA agents and the DXS team. Our people really walked into a political minefield set in place by the corruption, and criminal conspiracies, of several WAC's lawyers who were receiving help from elected officials and public functionaries on both sides of the border. That is why Lucas Wolenczak ran off to Canada instead of staying put in San Francisco a week ago. If he had known about his diplomatic (immunity) status and multiple capacities under the North-American Mid-Line Treaty of 1930, he would most certainly not have ran anywhere but to his lawyers, or the US Department of Defense, to lay a binding formal complaint against POTUS for his jurisdictional infringement."

Hetty paused for five seconds before continuing; "As it was, my confidential informants in Ottawa (yes, I have some in that city) are telling me about a great deal of political kerfuffle going on in the Trudeau cabinet, since this corruption seems to reach all the way up to the country's Prime Minister himself. There appears to be a history of bad blood between the Wise family and the Trudeau family.
that was quite virulent back in the early 1900's, but was forgotten since the 1980's. Evidently, someone thought to revive this dormant feud in early 2000's as a means to obfuscate the laws and legal forces while they tried to steal, defraud, and extort, from the Wise Heritage and WAC's conglomerate. Evidence suggests that their limited successes have been thwarted, and whatever ill-gotten gains they accrued will be returned to their victim, or be billed out of them via judicial penalties. I will post updated information on the case as it becomes available on the general data boards on NCIS servers. We will no longer speak of this in our live conferences, as this part of the mess has little bearing on our situation."

Deeks surprised the other agents by snorting aloud his disagreement at their leader's words.

Hetty pursed her lips, wondering what that was about, so she asked. She had an idea, but having confirmation was always nice, when one was dealing with spies, black ops and betrayals.

Marty sat straighter in his chair, putting his elbows on the tabletop so he could join his hands to set his chin on top as he spoke slowly, giving himself the time to articulate his thoughts before voicing them. The points he wanted to make were all germane to their agency's situation, but they had so many damned complexities to deal with that it wouldn't take a lot to become mired in small useless parts, all the while losing sight of the big picture.

"Okay, first of all, you can all bet that we'll be talking about this in our briefings from now on, at least three or five times a week. Lucas Wolenczak as a person has, until the two governments negate it, a title that puts him in the crux of industrial, military, judicial, law-making and diplomatic institutions across the board, at all levels of national, state and municipal authorities. His legally bound zone of activity is not only vast, but also fluid and exportable in real time along with his industrial endeavors. This means that as of now, with Washington DC nothing but a hole in our bad memories, he may very well be the senior-most military and jurisdictional officer still in post. That would accidentally give him genuine material authority over all policemen, firemen, ambulances, hospitals, national guard, standing military, and the courts of the land, until a new government can be constructed via elections. All in all, if ANY of you think we aren't gonna spend time talking about this kid and analyzing his activities, you're delusional. The only reason we don't call him 'Boss' right now is because he's so drowned in his own internal messes with his inheritance and companies, plus the Canadian mess, that we're flying dark under the radars. But, mark my words, it won't last for ever. This kid is a workaholic perfectionist with eidetic memory, multiple genius-level competences, severe control issues and a nasty, aggressive self-preservation instinct that's already triggered hard years ago."

Looking at Hetty straight in the face, he elocuted quite darkly "If I were you, I would count my days of freedom preciously and enjoy them fully before the Lord Master comes calling. He won't be bearing glad tidings and gifts of friendship. Wolenczak is a mathematically driven utilitarian who will reduce you to a set of stats, like an RPG character sheet, then manage your job, career and life from that data spread, regardless of whatever you can try. And trying is pointless. The people of Toledo who had managed to survive the first onslaught of the civil war could tell you that, if any were still alive. You get in the way of what the Doc thinks is the most efficient and expedient manner of handling a task, and you'll be processed down to serve as axle grease for your troubles. Or maybe greenhouse fertilizer, cuz with the climate changing hard, he's gonna need more of those pretty soon."

Sam Hanna, already in a furious mood from unexplained reasons before the meeting, exploded verbally at his friend. "Whose side are you on, Deeks? Cuz you don't sound like you're on ours anymore, the way you're talking 'bout stuff." the ex-soldier accused venomously.

Marty answered toxically, wearing a smile that was all teeth, "Well, you see now, that's why I'm the
detective and you're a soldier. I detect, inspect and understand the evidence on the scene; I don't just believe stuff then follow that in a bull rush. So you see, I'm on the side of the man who legally and morally holds the strings to my oaths as a law enforcement officer of the USA. And the evidence at hand in the case says that has better than 85% chance of being one Doctor Lucas Wolenczak, 'Constable – Governor' of the USA – Canada Mid-Line for the foreseeable future. Which, incidentally, makes him Hetty's boss, and yours by hierarchy as a result. So we're actually on the same side, big guy, just as always. It's just I'm with the program already, you're the one playing catch-up for a change."

Sam's face was constipated with anger, sorrow and morosity as he spat out "Not in my life, he ain't! What the fucking Hells has this kid done to be in charge? And who would be stupid enough to recognize him as the country's top dog, anyhow? Do you think the Russians and Chinese are going to give a crap about what he is, or what's inside his overgrown head?"

The LAPD liaison agent replied glibly, still wearing his shit-eating smirk, "Well, I would think that the nuclear explosions on the site of DC would cool down the ardors of anyone thinking that there is such a thing as a 'good little war' to be had these days. Plus, the crashed economy has pauperized every country on the planet, so the populations are too busy trying to eat and stay warm to give a hoot about national pride and border security anymore. Then again, maybe the fact the kid owns and operates several biochemical factories that manufacture live antibiotics, and therefore potential bio-weapons, could have an influence. The fact he just used the extremely secret, yet not very legal, Copernicus space stations to carve up parts of Ohio like a flaming Christmas roast turkey could also have a clue to what the world leaders will be thinking about him, his capacities, and his diplomatic standing on the world stage. Just inane little thingies like those, you know, just off the top of my head!" the policeman spat out poisonously, with enough sarcasm and anger to make even the angry SEAL sit back in reaction.

{ SQ } --- { Eric steps up to the plate } --- { SQ }

Eric Beale swallowed passed a lump in his throat and almost choked on it when everybody at the table, already extremely keyed-up from everything in the last 7 days, were suddenly glaring daggers at him for his movement and noise. Becoming aware that he was in a room full of aggressive, fully stimulated predators already riding an adrenaline high, the man had to steel himself quite a lot to avoid cowering visibly in front of his teammates. Placing his hands palms down on top of the table to show he was unarmed and harmless, the technician gave his most wan, friendly smile he had, hoping it would defuse the volatile situation before the knives came flying at him.

"Mister Beale." Hetty's voice cut through the tension like an old rusty chainsaw, "Do you, perchance, have anything to add to this discussion? Your wisdom would be welcome." she elocuted in a tone that seemed to subconsciously promise him much pain in reward if he did intervene. Unfortunately, he did need to say something, if only for their common survival.

Mentally girding his courage, Eric spoke in the soft, gentle voice that he was known for, never realizing just how much of a calming effect he had on the field agents. To them, Eric speaking meant that the critical infos or the tactical advantage they needed to knock out the perps were on the way, through their earwigs or some tech being rush-delivered by another agent. Without seeing the symptoms for what they were, Eric taking the risk of speaking out in the conference actually changed the mood drastically, shifting the agents from their 'fighting' mode back over to 'staging' mode, which was far more conducive to civilized agreement and planning long-term.

"Excuse me for being the bearer of bad news, Director Lange, but, about the situation on the planet at large... The Russians have contacted the European Union to declare a unilateral draw-down of military troops at the borders, to be replaced by regular police for the foreseeable future. As far as we
can intercept with the remaining satellites we can access, Moscow has recalled all Spetsnaz black-ops teams back into the Mother Land for internal security activities. All GRU activities out of borders are also being scaled back, and in the case of many countries in south-America or Africa, being shuttered completely with all personnel being ferried back to Russia. The Chinese seem to be undergoing a similar reaction with their respective national borders; an inflection of forces to stabilize the interior. This, of course, could be seen as germane to the continuous firing of the Copernicus stations all along the new Great Eastern Split to terraform some shapes into the blasted deadlands for future human colonization efforts. We shouldn't discount the dissuasive effect of seeing thousands upon thousands of particle beam cones pulverizing and flattening the landscape. It is possible that a very simple, and efficient, method of resolving the salt water infiltration crisis in a usable time-frame has had the secondary effect of scaring stiff some terrorists, and the cockamamie leaders of banana republics, into thinking rationally, for a change."

Grisha sat back in his chair, exchanging looks with Sam, Kensi and Anna in turn, then Hetty, Nell, and finishing with Deeks. He seemed satisfied with what he saw because he got up to activate the counter-top Keurig brewer for a hot coffee to occupy his hands with.

Passing roughly a weary hand over his bald head, the black skinned SEAL grumbled nastily under his breath before saying "Mocha-cream with two creams in it, no sugar. Please."

Callen turned towards his usual mission partner with an amazed expression on his face, snarking back "Do I look like your barista, now? Do you want an apple pie or a brownie with that?" he quipped as the soldier ignored his witty comeback to concentrate on the raw strategic data he'd been fed. He was angry at a lot of stuff, but the sources were reliable. Hell, in this context they were nigh on unimpeachable, almost to the level of Hetty herself since she'd be making her decisions based on the same.

Anna got up as well, using the brewer to make herself a soothing green tea with cream and lemon juice from a small bottle nestled in the condiment basket. She then prepared a pair of holiday hot chocolates with peppermint and marshmallows for Eric and Nell who liked the sweet confection during this time of year.

Needing to move to get her mind in gear, Kensi stood up to stretch a bit as she walked around the long table to fetch her fiancé and herself their favorite drinks to continue the conversation on a more friendly tone. Things had gotten heated pretty quickly, but thankfully had tamped down just as fast. A pair of strong Brasilia dark coffees with plenty of cream & sugar would set her man's spirit back at ease, just as surely as it would for her.

Hetty kept herself dry for the meeting, especially given that she was too deeply in thought to move out of her chair, and she'd already drunk enough tea since waking up to fill a small wading pool. Further liquid fuel was not needed, for a rare occasion as she rarely passed an opportunity to indulge. That, and the well known fact amongst professional interrogators that having food on the table or in hand usually set a friendlier atmosphere, thus people were more likely to open up to reveal things.

Sam took his mug from Callen with a grateful smile, patting his friend's hand in thanks as he did, then taking a careful sip of the scalding beverage to get the double kick of caffeine and warmth. Gazing pensively at Deeks and Beale in turn, he spoke in the much more usual strong, firm but controlled, tone of voice that was his normal attitude in meetings. "Okay. Let's look at this mess like the blond bros told it. We have a situation unfolding that will come back to bite us in the ass pronto. Hetty; did you know, or suspect, that this could be the result when you publicly acknowledged this guy as constable-whatever? Is there a long game we need to know about, getting played in the
backrooms?"

Sighing deeply, Henrietta Lange replied carefully "I was reacting quickly to a dangerous, volatile, and potentially genocidal, mess that was progressing before my eyes at light speed. And I had to deal with the fallout from Mosley's failed attempt at a theocracy of her own, which was dragging down the reputation and credibility of NCIS like lead ballast. Not to mention that as a law-enforcement institution, NCIS was almost wiped off the map to begin with. The Los Angeles division was barely functional and New Orleans on a respirator; everywhere else was dead, abandoned or destroyed by the Trumpists, and then the criminals when the prisons broke down. Actively throwing our lot in with Wolenczak was the least suicidal of the options on the table. Given the speed and alacrity with which Mathilda Webber placed DXS in line with the young doctor's plans, I decided to follow my gut feelings, and hers too, in the hopes that it would give us the best amount of resources and organizational support necessary to build a basis for permanent survival. What the end result will be, even I don't know that. Neither do Webber, Wolenczak, Trudeau, Dre or anyone else."

Sam pursed his lips then asked again, with a more pressing tone this time, "You didn't answer me. You're edging around the subject, but you aren't giving me straight words. Did you know, or foresee, that this could put NCIS in a position of being legally subordinate to the boy himself? Or that there would happen a dotted-line sort of relationship in the command chain as a result?"

Hetty took her glasses off her face to drop them tiredly on the tabletop, looking at all the people around the room before she answered. "Yes. I did understand, conceptually and intellectually, that this move could result in our becoming de facto subordinates to a 16 year old boy with a drawer full of diplomas, several territorial holdings shrouded in armored walls with their own utilities and infrastructures, and the biggest cache of space-based weapons anybody on Earth could command. I saw the way that events were unfolding, and I bet that one tyrant would be better than the other options. Only time and the history we write in our lives will tell if it was the proper choice. I do believe, however, that Lucas Wolenczak will work hard at establishing lasting peace in America, and the rest of Earth, if only so that his own people don't have to be put in harm's way by the civil wars of the USA, or others reaching into his protected areas. That, plus his inherently territorial mentality coupled to his flagging health lead me to believe that he will not have the desire for war, or conquest, in the coming decade at the very least. If the problems with his health are resolved properly, or he gets an inordinate number of military-trained personnel to join his ranks, we could see a change in the statistical portrait. My gut is good, but nothing is permanent, especially not in politics and social issues."

{ SQ } --- { Banking intrigues } --- { SQ }

Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:25am

Anna asked gently "Eric. Could you please tell us what you see in these events? You have a perspective that is closer to the raw numbers and factoids than us in the meat grinder. You seem to think that nobody will take advantage of the fact the USA is defunct, and the borders are practically wide open for anybody to pass through. Why is that?"

Giving the blond Russian native a kind smile in return, Eric explained slowly his thought process and the data he based it on. "Now, you have to know that the CIA and several dozens of sister agencies have bugged out on the day of Trump's reveal of the Roseanic Chapel. That means that they took much of their man-portable inventory to help their families survive, while burning or blasting those things they couldn't in an effort to deny their usage to the Christian fanatics. However, none of the satellites were ever affected by this self-destruct planning. The reason? Because GPS navigation and automated weather monitoring all depend on the sats to orbit the planet reliably. If you down the sats, you kill off the usefulness of the climatic recycling towers, you render travel, trade and exploration..."
very unreliable, and maybe dangerous in wild zones, and computer assisted navigation would no longer be possible. But! The satellites still work just as the day they got up there, so we can bypass all the red tape from the dead agencies to access directly (and control) their sats for our own needs, including maintaining long ranged wireless comms with allies."

Taking a sip of hot chocolate, Eric wrapped both hands around the warm vessel to take strength from the simple little pleasure, inhaling the spicy aroma before a second sip. Placing the porcelain mug on the table, he kept his hands wrapped around it as he continued speaking. "You all know by now that Nell and I know quite the bag of tricks when it comes to targeting sats to snoop in the other guy's backyard, digitally and physically. Well, we have spent the last two days splitting our attention between the domestic mess and the planetary one. I let Nell handle the household affairs because she actually dealt with most of the agencies that died out when she was at NSA, and kept that up when she joined us. I handled the rest of the planet, and saw quite a few telling moves by the confederations and local countries. Everything indicates a planet-wide recession; an economic crash much worse than whatever Wolenczak had in mind when he targeted the churches and ecclesiastes for having supported Trump's crusade against him."

Eric detailed further his point: "I have surveyed thousands of governmental, institutional and military bank accounts, transaction lists and asset movements, in the last 48 hours, and the portrait painted is ugly. Many of the self-called 'modern' countries had begun converting all their gold and precious material reserves to paper, plastic, or cybernetic currencies, since the feared Y2K bug threatened to derail society. After the bug was averted by modernizing attritioned cybernetic parks, those same countries maintained their national policies of converting to the more nimble, and almost invisible, electronic currencies to facilitate global trade and cooperation. The fact that most governments use a plethora of anonymous numbered accounts routed through dark wed Tor servers as their basic banking strategy will not be expounded on at present. Suffice it to say that, when doctor Wolenczak declared cybernetic warfare against the planet's churches, he inadvertently set off a chain of dominoes that, accidentally, collapsed the entire economy of every industrial nation, since they no longer had more solid coinage than e-money in hand."

Here Eric took off his glasses to rub at his eyes, trying to keep the details in order as he explained the complex chain of accidents that caused the planetary mess. "When the servers didn't just hijack or reroute the amounts but actually wiped out the money, the accounts, and even the client ID files up to and including their Social Security ##, it triggered a cascading failure across all systems. Basically, if you have a bank account, that data is used not just for mortgages but also to evaluate your social security in case you lose your job or get sick, it's part of the tax calculus each year and, in some cases, it's even required by some employers to divulge the data, like here at NCIS – OSP. So when the bank accounts get erased, this triggers automatic refusals or dismissals from a bunch of services and utilities in a one-way, fully automated maneuver that can be reversed only when you call the customer service to speak with a human. At which point, if you have no client ID or credit score anymore, you are automatically refused membership or subscription, even to governmental services & utilities. So, by accident, the attack fumbled hard; from a very tightly profiled group of racist, ageist, sexist bigots, the whole thing exploded outwards and scorched the Earth like wildfire. And this is true from the richest countries to the poorest, from the most advanced to the most primitive. There is only solid cash and material goods left to trade with, and any nation or company that trusted e-money to exist is pretty much screwed irremediably."

Nell chimed in, her peppy tone of voice much more sober than usual. "We can see and understand what the young man tried to do. He wanted to neuter and lobotomize the churches so they would stop pushing on the Trumpists with money, speeches and voter registration drives. His goal was to silence them by withdrawing from the equation the only reason they do anything: the money. Kill off the revenue streams and they wither away in silence. At that point, he identified three methods by which they made money and went after them all; the worshipers who tithe, the private schools who
bill the kids' parents, and the private hospitals that charge patients for care. All of these moneys were used to fund what the ecclesiastes call 'missionary works' but in fact is just the organized (and legally shielded) spread of bigotry, racism, sexism, ageism and antisemitism."

Nell made of face of disgust as she specified; "Here, we can prove that he had wanted to limit the scope and power of his attack, but idiots caused the Earth-wide hecatomb. You see, unfortunately, despite Lucas delimiting his targets very carefully, the systems holding the data are actually badly programmed, and so they applied the orders wrongly. When a person's bank ID and SS## were wiped off, the computers didn't block the client's file and flash an alert as they are supposed to do. No, instead, the defective software silently deleted the entire file without even recording it as a client-demanded closure, which would leave traces. By doing a cold wipe of the sort, it was like inflicting an electromagnet straight into the hard drives of the servers, leaving the data modules a mess of disparate bytes floating randomly on the disks without any coherent order anymore. And that caused a secondary cascade, taking out what few functioning accounts remained to float the economy on."

Kensi asked, with a frown of deep thought on her face, "Are you both certain that this cascading effect was all accidental? It seems pretty automated to me, like it was meant to do that."

Nell shook her head negatively with certitude as she replied. "No, it was accidental. We know because Lucas Wolenczak was forebearing enough to send us and DXS a complete, non-edited version of the attack program and target roster he used. What you don't know is that this guy is one of the World Bank's top rated tech suppliers for software AND hardware. He has steadily been climbing the security level and pay grade ladders over the last 5 years, and is now part of the WB's directorate-level committee for network protocols & transaction security. It would be a fair assessment to say that he's their equivalent of Eric and myself, all wrapped into one angsty teenaged package. With hormones, sarcasm and extra angst included." the young woman quipped as concluded her explanation.

Eric picked up there; "What Nell means is that doctor Wolenczak understands the planetary networks and banking apparatus like few people can, since he's part of its conception and building team. That means that the only way he could botch a cybernetic attack as simple as a list-based file erasure is because an event external to his processes happened. In this case, we searched and found the cause of the cascading mess. Doc W. planned his attack by relying on the banks having installed anti-fraud and anti-collusion software that was mandated by the World Bank three years ago in 2017, with the deadline for compliance being 1st July of 2020. This software was created by Wolenczak & team to insure that situations like the fake accounts at Wells & Fargo don't happen anymore. The logging program is supposed to record all the maneuvers on client ID's & accounts separately from the bank's proprietary management suite so that if you find discrepancies, you have a locked, independent and secured, source of data to compare with. Including the employee ## to trace back who did what, like shunting money overseas or faking accounts, cheques, drafts, etc..."

Eric rubbed a hand roughly over his short cropped blond hair nervously as he laid the blame where it belonged. "The problem is, while the WB delivered the program to its partner banks in October 2017, practically NONE of them bothered with installing it. In each country, the banks invoked 'client confidentiality' concerns to slow down the process, some took the WB to court to block the install. Some governments, like Trump in the USA, also actively tried to block the thing because it was specifically designed as a law-enforcement tool to track fraud, but also to help identify victims that deserved refunds and compensations for the damages they suffered. And we all know that Trump and his billionaire boys' club in the White House were never the biggest fans of helping people get justice or compensation for anything. And that is why the cyber attack went wild; the stop-gap program that was supposed to limit the effect to only what was parametered in the hack wasn't present, so BOOM! went the planet's economy."
Nell said, a bit more chipper than before, "Think of it this way. What happened is like when the inspector comes to your condo block and says that you need to install fire-proof insulation in the floors, walls and ceilings to protect the building in case something happens in one unit. Then, the owners get together, blab about it, and decided that it's too expensive, not necessary, they won't waste the time, etc... So nothing gets done. Three years later, somebody falls asleep on his couch with a lit cigarette in his mouth, starting a cushion fire in his unit. Normally, that's a pretty small thing to contain, and quick business too. But this building isn't insulated. There aren't any fire breaks, or air gaps, or steel plates, or anything to stop the flames from spreading all over the couch, rugs, drywall, wooden carpentry, through to the other units all around. And the building goes up like a roman candle. The end."

Eric spread his hands wide open in a 'that's all folks' gesture as he nodded. "Simple as that. The young genius thought he had programmed enough limits and constrictions in his hack to leave the normal, innocent people alone, but the greedy, lazy, and dishonest bastards in banks & governance alike had not done the jobs they were mandated by law & treaty, so the whole thing went up in smoke. It was, in truth, an accidental overreach."

Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:40am

"I hate computers." Sam Hanna growled lowly with many, many feelings, and all of them were negative. "The older I get, the less tolerance for this shite I have. When the fuck are we gonna go back to single switch on/off machines? Even my damn phone gets on my nerves lately."

Sam had the strange experience of looking at Eric Beale's face and suddenly, genuinely, fear for his life and soul at the thunderous expression the other man wore. Sinking into his chair a bit, the SEAL amended quickly, "Okay, maybe the phone didn't do nut'tin, but the damn ringer won't stay what I choose anymore. It's getting bothersome but not important enough to grab one of you to fix it. We're in a civil war; there's better things to fix than my phone tones." The large muscular man explained as he sank lower still into the cushions of his seat, wilting under the combined glares of the Tech Twins.

Pursed lips and squinted, angry eyes ablaze, Eric held out his right hand, palm up, wiggling his fingers demandingly at the older agent. Knowing the value of a timely strategic retreat when confronted with demented techno-geeks on a rampage, Sam passed over his phone without a sound. At least Eric and Nell wouldn't be making THOSE eyes at him anymore while they were agog over his miss-configured phone for the rest of the meeting.

Hetty didn't really try to hide her small discrete smirk as she folded her hands on her lap, gazing amusedly at her troops' antics. They desperately needed the morale boost that a bit of levity would garner them. And it was quite funny, watching the big brawny Sam Hanna, who was the pillar of strength and durability for the team, get henpecked by the much smaller and leaner Eric Beale over such a banal matter.

Callen smiled openly as he sipped some of his coffee, his entire face alight with amusement at his partner getting reamed over his – questionable – opinion on the state of modern technology by the team's most lightweight fighter. Although, if you gave Eric a case of grenades, you'd have better results than the average cop could produce with their service pistol. People had a nasty tendency to forget that Eric and Nell didn't spend 100% of their time chained to a smocking keyboard. They did go in the field a handful of times per year, and brought the perps in when they did. That didn't take away from their masterfully accomplished primary jobs as hackers, analysts and tech-genies-in-a-bottle, but some people – Sam – could learn to remember that. But if he didn't, Grisha would have some more fun at his expense as he ribbed him mercilessly for his prompt retreat, as soon as they
were alone in the car, on the road to the next assignment.

"Alright, people! Settle down! Nothing to see here!" Kensi said in her best 'traffic cop' voice imitation to get the meeting back in order, which didn't stop her from aiming a shit-eating grin at Sam's expense.

Hetty firmly tapped her impeccably manicured nails on the tabletop to have the attention centered on herself again. "While I fully endorse mister Beale's esprit-de-corps in helping mister Hanna with his technological performance issues (collective groans of snark) we do have to dispense the tasks for the coming week, and still have a few tactical problems to address." she told them with a blank face that hid her mirth. Making certain that Eric was at least partially aware of events around him during the conference, the elderly spymaster took the pole anew, as she had bad, not so bad, and a bit less bad, news to impart unto her crew.

{ SQ } --- { Bah! What a mess } --- { SQ } 

Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:55am

"Now, we come to the part of this meeting that you all dreaded. We have to handle the fallout from Shay Mosley's despicable betrayal, including hundreds of cadavers that are rotting in the buildings that will now become our bunkered redoubt. We have been insured by doctor Wolenczak that the toxin used was an inert chemical which is anaerobic and hydrophobic. The practical aspect of this poison is that it oxidizes quite rapidly, and reacts badly to water. It exists in open atmosphere for only 1 hour then dissolves into inoffensive separate elements. It suffers a similar fate, but much quicker, when exposed to liquid water or humidity levels above 60% of the air contents. As such, the enclave is now safe to enter for processing, which will happen after all 6 of you go through it with a fine-toothed comb. I dread that Mosley has left a self-destruct system or some sort of 'insurance' that would keep her in a position of dominance over the sect she was attempting to build. Your task is to infiltrate, physically and cybernetically, the redoubt to clear it from traps and hazards, including live munitions and weapons that are in the rigid hands of the dead. After that, you will withdraw back to the Spanish House for a shower and hot meal, while the Beta Team goes in, with civilian recruits we have managed to gather, to clean out the cadavers for human habitation. After the buildings have been detailed fully, we will establish a schedule for all agents to recover their families and move them into the redoubt in the quarters that will be assigned for their needs."

Marty glared at the tabletop, lips so tightly pinched they became a thin white line, making the tired dark bags under his eyes and air of general fatigue around him seem more intense. "Is there any way that I could volunteer to help you figure out the legal mess with the beavers and UEO instead? I suddenly have a deeply seated desire to stay away from anything related to Shay Lynn Mosley as much as I can, if it's all the same to you." The LAPD detective asked, looking as if he were going to keel over soon if he didn't get some rest.

Hetty let silence spread around the room for twenty long seconds as she contemplated the man's flagging health before answering him. "Yes, about that. I had planned to announce this a bit more gently, but needs must. It is my deep displeasure to inform you, mister Deeks, that the Los Angeles Police Department has collapsed in its entirety and has become defunct as an agency. I was planning to speak with you privately to ask what you were planning as alternative employment, since there is clearly no longer any directorate, managers, or supervisors, to handle Human Resources, pay, benefits and such for the employees. Perhaps you would give consideration to joining us on a permanent, internal basis? We do appreciate your perspective, and personality, just as much as your policing abilities and tactical skillset." she offered with a soft gentle smile towards the young man for whom she had a great deal of esteem and affection.
Deeks took in a deep breath, seeming to actually be relieved by the news, rather than upset by it. His eyes locked on to a smaller screen hanging on the wall behind Anna Kolchek that was set to always display the main square that was the Spanish House's internal hub for moving people. Tapping his fingers rhythmically on the armrest of his chair, Marty blinked slowly as his mind processed through the options and consequences that would result of any choice made. His dark blue eyes moved over to Kensi who sat silently on his left side, nearer to Hetty as she often exchanged comments or notes with the older woman during these meetings. Seeing his answer in the face of his fiancée, he turned to their wizened boss to give his own terms.

"I was preparing a surprise for Kensi that, pretty obviously, won't go through. But, if you and I can come to an agreement on it, you'll have yourself an expert on policing protocols and a whole bunch of laws that, unless I miss my guess, you're still operating with. So, on a probationary term, I could tentatively give you a positive signal to your inquiry." he completed with a wide smile that seemed to shave a few years and tons of stress off his entire person in a blink.

As Kensi whapped him playfully in the left biceps with the back of her hand, several snorts and guffaws of humor erupted around the table just as Sam exclaimed "What's with this day? All the silent types are showing off big brassy round ones, all a sudden!"

Callen almost choked on his gulp of lukewarm coffee at that comment, inciting Anna to pat him on the back in fake sympathy as she laughed at his misfortune.

Nell verbally sucker punched both Sam and Marty at the same time by commenting out loudly, wide grin solidly in place; "Deeks? One of the 'silent' types? In what world have you been living, lately? Who are you, and what have done to Sam Hanna?" she turned to Eric, grabbing his arm to ask in fake urgency "Quick! Check through his phone to see if it's still him! There should be evidence in there!"

Eric was shaking with laughter as he handed said phone back to the older soldier, having found the rather simple problem quickly enough to solve it inside of 5 minutes flat. He had to take a breath to steady his hand to avoid dropping the device, so he settled for putting it on the tabletop and sliding it leftwards to the darkly glowering male who sat at the foot of the table, as he always did in meetings.

"Funny." Sam deadpanned as he recovered his mobile phone from the younger man. "Hi-La-Ri-Ous the lot of you's. Well, ya'll can take advantage of the Holiday Spirits to sit on a pine tree and spin left & right till it feels funny. See how you like that, bunch of bratty wannabees..." he griped while trying hard to keep a serious face, despite the visible spasms of laughter that wanted to erupt from him.

The fall of House Abernathy

(Bones – opening theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 11:15am
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:15am
Abernathy homestead, rural area
Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Finn Abernathy hated his family's old, dilapidated house with several different passions.

It was well over 80 years old, made of old, warped wooden beams and boards that were either rotted
or eaten through by ants at one point or another. It was a single storey high, resting on four feet tall stacks of mortared field stones to create a crawlspace that was never finished or insulated properly. The original 3 bedroom & 1 bath construction had gotten three different extensions over the years; a master bedroom with en-suite bath & twin walk-in closets in the 1960's, a bunk room in the 1970's, and a damned combination chapel & sacristy in the early 1970's. The mismatched, angled roof-lines hid many flaws in the structure and all the holes in the old roofing sheets and shingles that were as rotted through as the foundation beams, joists and floor boards. The miserable crawlspace that served as an attic went from nearly 7 feet tall above the master bed to less than 2 feet tall in dreary, humid, remote corners.

The plumbing wasn't up to code since the 1950's, and probably had lead, copper and other pollution in the water when the taps were opened. Taking a bath wasn't recommended since the water's color meant you didn't really know if you were getting clean or not, unlike a shower where at least the crud sloughed off your body enough to give you an idea. Trying to drink or cook with this water wasn't done unless it boiled a good ten minutes in the kettle first, or you'd get Raleigh's Revenge for a week, then remember to boil the bloody stinking grass oil next time around.

There wasn't any central venting or AC, and that was a good thing, since it would never have gotten cleaned and the variety of fungi in the ducts would have kept Jack Hodgins quite ecstatic long enough to dissertate about them all. The proof was in the evidence, as doctor B liked to remind him; the six movable wheeled AC units were all old, damaged, deficient and soiled with mold, fungi and stains from food, rodents and other stuff that Jeffersonian protocols required a HAZMAT suit to handle. As it was, even the fly screens in the windows and the rear screened-in porch were old, rusted, had bent wires and scores of holes large enough for a drunken hummingbird to fly through safely, at night in a rainstorm, too.

The heating was produced by natural gas fueled wall units in each important room, including the kitchen's range/oven and a pair of porch heaters. Three large fieldstone fireplaces sat imperiously in the pile of unsecured lumber; the original set between the living room and kitchen, in the wall of the master chamber that separated the en-suite from the bed, and behind the stone altar, in the wall that separated the sacristy from the chapel. Occasionally, on very bad winters like 2018 or 2019, portable kerosene stoves were taken from the garage to produce heat if either the gas or electricity went out.

Speaking of which, out in rural areas like here, the power lines were old, seldom replaced, and tended to fall out of the poles at every rainstorm, sleet or blizzard that was just a bit too windy or left a half inch of crud accumulated along the aged, frayed wires. That meant power went out often, and most houses or farms had a diesel generator in a garden shed or small aluminum casing to compensate for the inevitable moments when the power would be cut, taking days to reset. Their generator was an old lawn tractor engine that had rubber belts linking it to a pair of mismatched alternators that didn't spin all that well, nor made that much juice, and the current produced had shaky wattage to boot.

On top of things, the old house still used antiquated knob & tube wiring in the original parts of the building and the garage, with a wall panel that relied on glass fuses to break the circuit in case of overload. The box blew one or two fuses almost every month, so a large plastic container full of new fuses, a torchlight and a paper diagram of the panel was set on a shelf under the rusted junction box. This contrasted badly with the modern additions, running on semi-standard wires and a new breaker panel set right next to the ancient one, in the kitchen's half-wall that held the fireplace shared with the receiving room.

The windows were mismatched between old & dirty, old & cracked, new & cracked, and salvaged from who-knew-where to replace those that had broken out completely. In some places like on each side of the front door, in the attic dormer above the master suite, the chapel and sacristy, were cheap
and ugly imitation stained glass that were made by putting an industrially manufactured sticky acetate on top of an ordinary transparent glass pane. These decorative touches barely lasted a year before the climate, cleaning soaps and insects ate holes in them or bleached out the colors, showing them to be just as cheap and badly done as they looked to visitors.

Inside went from bad-kitsch to bad-bad-bad burn-it-all bad.

The wall-to-wall carpet that covered most of the floors except the kitchen and baths to give a modest amount of thermal insulation in fall and winter dated back to the moment each section of the house was built. That meant that patches of rug didn't really match in color tones or thickness, and they had all suffered from the lack of proper flooring by absorbing moisture, food crumbs and detritus until they were partly rotten or had been chewed by ants that burrowed through the base plywood sheets.

The curtains in the windows were a bit more recent, having all been changed in the year 2006, following Finn's mom's divorce. She went on a modest spending spree to spruce up the house, in a vain hope of attracting a better type of husband the second time around. Unfortunately, the curtains and hangings had all suffered the same fate as the rugs, since they were the long style that went all the way down to touch the floor, so the humidity and ants had taken their toll as they did with everything.

The furniture was mostly wooden framed with cloth or canvas upholstery, which of course meant that the aforementioned humidity, detritus and ants had made their way into the couches, sofas, beds and even the legs of some tables or chairs.

Sometimes, in the Fall, you could see columns of small ants crawling up and down the baseboards of the bedrooms, or all over the shelves in the pantry, or the back of the bathroom cabinets. The sanitary crawlspace under the house was full of them all year long because the got just enough heat from the human dwelling to never truly freeze in winter. Honestly, if it weren't for the three stone chimneys holding up the timber frame, the house would have collapsed a long time ago.

Well, Finn Abernathy hated that house, but it was all he had left in the world, so he'd have to make do, no matter how much he wanted to burn it down. Although, one of these winters, a stray cinder from one of the fireplaces would take care of that for him; he would bet on it.

The young man, 21 years old and going on 22 soon, could only gaze in sullen despair at all the cleaning and washing he had to do to put this place back in order, if he didn't torch it. Unless he wanted to live in the drafty old wooden garage, or the equally drafty and old fowl coop next to it, he would have to make the damnable hovel salubrious again in some order.

Gawd but blood stains were a pain in his well rounded ass to wash out by hand, especially from fabrics and cushions that were so old, moldy and decrepit that the original colors could only be guessed at vaguely. Snort! A poor colorblind soul could tell him the color of those pieces just as well as he could; that was how bad the damages from usage and time's passing were.

The young adult sighed in miserable, lonely despair as he rolled the sleeves of his red checkered flannel shirt, then those of the long sleeved beige T-shirt that he wore underneath. Sighing again at how his Christmas was going to get spent crawling on all fours around this soiled pigsty, the young man looked at his face in the tall, narrow, mirror that hung on the right side of the kitchen's fireplace. His white skin was pallid to the point of looking sallow with ill-health. His face was covered in fist-shaped bruises, scratches and two knife cuts he had to suture himself, just last night. The parts of his hands and forearms he had uncovered showed hand-shaped grasping bruises, scratches from clawing fingernails, and several long but shallow knife cuts that only required antiseptic cream and butterfly
stitches to keep them from accidentally tearing open fully. His thorax and abdomen had a plethora of bruises, but almost no scratches and, thankfully, no actual cuts from anything. The two black eyes were mostly superficial as the fists hadn't connected well enough to imprint fully around the eye sockets, a good thing as having his eyes swollen shut these days was not conducive to survival.

The young adult passed his hands softly through his long brown hair, then his face, in an attempt at centering his thoughts and emotions. What had happened last Monday, when the nukes blew up DC had changed the lives of millions of people, including his diminished family.

Finn had been on his holiday vacations from the Jeffersonian Museum's Forensic Anthropology division when the news showed the bitchcrap happening at the White House's Rose Garden on the Sunday morning. His leisurely stay at a motel with a young woman he had known in high school had been happening in Durham, some 25 miles west from Raleigh, to avoid her relatives and friends from seeing them together, since they weren't married and not planning to be. They both had their own cars, their own overnight bag, and steady jobs so the two days at the motel weren't gonna break their bank accounts. They had a couple of call-in meals, Saturday evening was a friendly dinner at good local restaurant after a late afternoon movie at the theater for some good old 'pals' time together. Their Friday and Saturday nights had been a well needed booty call that relaxed them both, getting rid of accumulated stresses that neither had been able to handle alone anymore.

Then, the damned Sunday morning news had been showed live on TV, the events of the Roseanic Chapel where he saw his bosses, friends, and the only real family worth the name, getting tortured, degraded, dehumanized and ultimately killed like rabid dogs by a crowd who were the actual wild animals in the room. Finn had been so shocked that he had decided, mostly via inaction, to stay in the motel room all the remaining Sunday because he was too distraught to know how to react.

That, and the girl he was with was black, something his few living relatives would not accept on a regular day. Now, with the Trump Crusade sounding the hunting horns in public, their being together could actually make her a target, especially with what the Papal Lord had decreed on TV. Better they both stay put in silence until things cleared out. One or several of the federal agencies, or the army, were bound to react violently to this crap and depose the coterie of bastards before the week was out. As it was, it didn't even have to wait that long; in a matter of mere minutes, during the Low Mass itself, the very priests and ecclesiastes that the Trumpists were betting on to keep them in power had been attacked so viciously that they panicked and kicked Team Trump and his crusade to the curb, all on their own.

That good news kept people's spirits buoyed all night until the Monday afternoon news, and the nukes exploding Washington DC off the friggin' maps, leaving a deep raw hole that the frozen, merciless waters of the Atlantic filled almost as fast as the pit was excavated. Seeing the state of things and the popular panic, his lady friend decided, on Monday evening, to chance going back to her parents' house where she still lived while she worked in the family business to save for an apartment. Their family had always stuck together, and she liked it that way, despite that her mom could be too religious, or just too mother-hen, at times.

She should have stayed in the motel with him. She'd still be alive if she had.

Jesselle got shot through the window of her living room alongside her parents and two brothers by a pair of fanatic rednecks in a stolen pickup truck with AR-15's and as much heroin in their veins as they put gas in the tank. They went on a spontaneous suicidal 'crusade' in response to the nukes killing off their exalted God-given Papal Lord and his cause. The stoned-out pair shot at more than 20 different houses before somebody with a rifle shot the driver then finished off the fool in the truck bed, when the car immobilized suddenly by merging with a street lamp.
It was after learning of the carnage on the local TV channel's News at 23:00pm that he got drunk but good and passed out until Tuesday evening, past dinner. Being alone, lonely and desperate for some sort of human company to help staunch the pain and grief, the young man had decided to take the hour long ride back to Raleigh where he just arrived too late to matter, as was the running them of his life.

His fucking step-dad, the mongrel that married his mom a decade back in 2009, had somehow managed to make it out of jail when a mass break-out occurred. His first idea was to get back to his woman to teach the damned bitch a lesson about keeping her pup in line when the 'MAN of the Domain' spoke aloud the Law of God for all to hear and obey. He'd been a Ku Klux Klan member since birth, an evangelical christian by trade as some sort of self-taught pastor with an internet-school diploma, and several tattoos showing Thor's hammer, Odin's crows, Celtic crosses and KKK blood drop shield.

The depraved racist bigot had wanted to marry his mom because the house came with the old chapel already installed an furnished, since mom's Pa had been a Pentecostal minister as well as the part-time assistant to the funeral director in the village. The criminal man married his mom on the quick then lost no time in beating the poor little 11 year old as much as he could, in the name of teaching him racial purity, Godly obedience to adults, and the soul-cleansing rites of Contrition to the Rod. Finn was age 14 when the habitual drunk tried to go further with him than the ritualistic bare-ass whuppin' with the strap that he found a reason to administer every week he saw the kid in the house. At that time, the step-father was so stone and drunk that he tried to rape his step-son via sodomy to assuage his domination over him.

Finn stabbed him with a folding knife he kept at all times for protection from the bastard since he began bringing his KKK allies his sermons and rituals every damned Friday and Sunday.

Unfortunately, the local sheriff was both a KKK member for close to six decades, since age 12, and one of those depraved minions who came at least once a week for sermons in the decrepit homestead chapel. He accepted the older male's story as it was told, even though Finn and his mother spoke truth, and it was known as the real truth. The sheriff just replied with sectarian platitudes about the Christian Creed on the obedience of boys towards the men of the Faith, then promptly faked the entire investigation report to make sure Finn got at least a year in Juvie. That didn't help the two old cruds, as Finn used the Boys' Helpline over the telephone to record a denunciation of them, which was investigated by the state troopers, landing the two men in jail themselves. They had stayed there until yesterday, when a group of White Power fanatics stormed the jail, devoid of guards, to release their comrades before the coloreds and queers could come in. Anybody not white was massacred, while the whites were given the liberty of taking anything they wanted then got lifts back to their towns of origin through the Klan's network of cronies.

So Fin arrived home Tuesday evening, passed 21:00pm, to find his old man and a trio of his thuggish acolytes, armed with knives, batons, pistols and long guns, having a party over the cold corpse of his poor beleaguered mom, whom they had beaten and raped to death over several hours. Being sent into shock a third (Fourth? Fifth?) time, the young man had crawled under the house floor to wait in the semi-warm spot next to the base of the kitchen's fireplace, regardless of the occasional ants that crawled over him in the dark. They weren't the aggressive or biting kind, so he wasn't bothered and let them be in return. He didn't have to wait much anyways.

The four elderly criminals were already drunk, then decided to take out some hashed weed for joints, powdered coke to sniff, and one had a heroin kit that he offered around but ended as the only user. After only two hours of wait, the four old cronies were so disconnected from reality that two didn't wake up at all while Finn beat them to death with the fireplace poker. His step-dad, much less intoxicated than believed, woke up in a drunken startle but not disconnected, just slowed down but
still dangerous, especially if he got his hands on one of the guns strewn around haphazardly. Thankfully, the two that woke up recognized the young medical doctor. They drunkenly decided they wanted to sate their lurid impulses on him as well as they had his mother, so they got handsy with him instead of just shooting him into submission as he feared would happen. The misjudgment cost them a long, miserable, damaging fight that only Finn survived.

And now, after a long night fraught with nightmares, feelings of survivor's guilt, the last shakes from the shock of the nukes, puking out over two hours the adrenaline rush of fighting for his life... Now he had to wash down the cesspit that generated his misery for two decades, unless he wanted to sleep in the master suite's bathtub again. It was pretty much the only part of the house not covered in blood stains or ransacked by the four criminals, while they were waiting for their turn at raping his mom in private on her own bed. The sounds of the blasted winds picking up speed outside had him thinking about his options a lot more seriously. The drafty old garage was becoming interesting, or at least the attic above the master since it topped 7 feet in the peak, allowing him to stand without hitting his head.

Fuck this turgid shite. He wan'nt doing this no more.

Washington DC was destroyed beyond any recovery. There was about 400 to 500 kilometers of devastation all around, with various degrees of fatality and material damages. Since Durham and Raleigh were both located approximately 470 kilometers south and west from DC, he had felt the motel windows shake and crack as the winds buffeted them as the sudden rise in temperature wreaked havoc on the molecular bonds inside the crystalline structures before cooling back down too quickly to be safe. The old Abernathy house was made a lot less sturdily than the cheap motel's steel frame and cement walls, so it had actually fared worse. Some windows blown out, shingles ripped off by winds, and plenty of dead fowl in the coops that nobody had cleaned out yet. And he was not looking forward to that part, atop of cleaning every damned room and corridor inside.

Finn had to throw out his old mattress cuz his fucktard step-dad took the time, when he wan'nt raping his ex-wife to death, to piss all over and take a dump on it as he waited for the others to finish the cunt off for him. He even wiped his ass crap with the pillow then dropped it back in place. The insult to his step-son was clear as the light from the nukes had been, no two ways about it.

That meant Finn didn't really have a 'home' for himself anymore, not in this house anymore.

In a moment of emotions that combined despair with the raw mathematically-driven utilitarianism he had learned from his beloved mentor, Doctor Temperance Brennan, he sat down in the kitchen on a cheap unsteady wooden chair to think things through. Gazing into the cheery red flames of the hearth, he let his mind pitch concepts and emotions around for a half hour before he started organizing every one in linear graphs by timeline and conceptual fields to help manage his decision-making process.

The conclusion was evident; this house, besides being a dump and unsanitary, held only bad and traumatic memories of loneliness, abandonment, betrayal, violence, molestation and bloodshed. There was nothing desirable in this building that he couldn't get from squatting in a more recently built abandoned house, or not finished constructing condo building. The only valuable property he owned was in his travel bags, since he didn't bother unpacking when he left the motel. So, really, there were no reasons to expend efforts on cleaning the place since he was abandoning it right as soon as he made his travel plans.

Now where would he go?

Well, he was a qualified doctor in human biology, anatomy, pathology, forensic sciences and general medicine. His second doctorate had been pending for the end of 2021, when he presented the
dissertation he had composed under doctor Brennan's mentorship. There were bound to be ways to get help, and a reasonable living situation, with creds like that.

In a moment of enlightenment, Finn stood to activate the small flat screen TV perched on the kitchen counter next to the sink. His Ma liked to watch the news when doing the dishes after the meals. So he powered on the device then dialed the CNN National channel to have a glimpse of the country's morning situation along the east coast. It wasn't pretty but gave him right there what he needed; the list of national guard barracks that were alive & active, including North Carolina. He took down the coordinates of the barracks, already thinking about what he could say to them. All a sudden, the young man stopped hard his many thoughts to simply contemplate the reality they lived in. They had several civil wars in progress and he was a qualified medical professional with expertise in traumatic accidents and violent combat injuries. Plus, he was considered a prodigy given he'd gotten several college diplomas before the age of 15, and his first doctorate at 18. The guards would welcome him with open arms, as long as his creds were true, which they were. All he had to do was decide if he braved the weather tonight or waited a few days for the coming east-coast storm to abate. Everything would simply fall in place naturally on arrival.

The pyre of the Khunestade

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 11:30am
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 08:30am
Church of Jesus the Redeemer of Blighted Souls
Tampa, Florida, USA

The rabid, panicking 88 year old 'Righteously Honored Faithful Cardinal' Harkady Munnroe Khunestade was windmilling his arms madly, raving against the world that had betrayed him and his kin. Standing as tall as his arthritis-crooked back allowed, he was making his last stand for glory atop the garishly decorated mass of molded concrete that served as cathedral for his family and sect since their clan bought the land back in the year 1800. The buildings had been wood, then brick, then finally remade out of armored poured concrete in the 1970's, whence it became obvious that the US federal government was turning into a sect of adorators of the Beast, Satan, the enemy of Jesus their God and Christ upon the Cross. They had needed to start preparations for the coming Tribulations whence the beast-men would wage war against the True Faithful, all across the lands of America and Earth.

And so it was, for nigh on 5 decades of the 20 their cult had existed, that they had prepared for the oncoming Apocalypse and Rapture as written in Scripture. They created armored bunkers under the cathedral and major buildings of their compound, linking them by tunnels that also permitted emergency exit towards the shores of the bay, the bayous, or even to the second basement of a rarely used machinery shed in the nearby public works truck yard.

Since the scare about the Y2K bug, the sect had learned its lesson and focused on mechanical devices that didn't require digital circuits or even electricity to work, like the steam powered pump that fed their internal aqueduct and moved their sewer sludge out to the city sewers.

Because of the modern times, they were still obliged to rely on electricity, especially for communications and management tasks. This explained the scores of small steel & plastic windmills that dotted the tops of their perimeter walls and living buildings to produce the electricity they needed
to charge cellphones or laptop computers. The sect being paranoid of a police intervention, they had willingly chosen since 2010 to convert all comms & CPU’s to the smallest portable versions of what they needed to connect and manage their resources in real time.

The group lived off the small communal garden and livestock they kept, but made their monetary revenues mostly through their garage to fix cars & trucks, do mods on rat-racers or create smuggling compartments for the various gangs they traded with. This same garage had two backrooms for the more dangerous aspects of their crafts. The first was for the mechanics of weapon smithing so they could build, repair or store any armaments they were planning to sell or smuggle. The second room was the chemistry lab to produce gun powder, fuses, blasting caps, incendiary liquids or even three different poison gases that their in-house chemist knew the recipes from his US army EOD training.

{ SQ } --- { Old dreams fading away } --- { SQ }

The Khunestade Clan had been militarized since their accidental arrival to America as deserters from the British warship 'The Prince's Fist' that was sunk by bad storm tides in the last weeks of December 1797, not far from the Florida Keys, which were mostly unexplored back then. Their ancestors had been two young teenaged brothers press-ganged into service out of London's seedy dock taverns who then learned their trades as carpenter and sail mender aboard ship directly.

This made the founding duo of the family understand the need to have skilled tradesmen in their household to insure that their sect would have revenues to survive the harsh climates in the colonies. That is why these boys understood HOW the government could do whatever it wanted to people; because they had guns and lots of weak-minded fools to do their bidding. The only remedy that insured they weren’t captured to be pressed back into service, or executed as deserters, was to have their own guns with lots of fools that would defend them. Thus, the two 15 & 16 year olds decided to found a sect to con people into obeying them, just like the monarchs did with the crown and the Anglican church.

Fast forward 223 years and it was the same logic and system in place. The leaders of the clan were afraid of being brought to heel by the lawful authorities of the Land, so they conned people by honeyed words then vile threats to keep them submissive to the Family. These poor souls knew quickly the true nature of the people they associated with, but also knew the utter ruthlessness of their methods and the length of their reach outside their compound. It was publicly admitted that the criminally made money paid for contractors to tie up loose ends while a few bribes, and matching threats, made the Florida politos and cops look away when things got noisy.

All this stubbornness, all this fierce independence, all these scurrilous hypocrisies, lies and perjuries, all these crimes, violations and depravities... All of it for nothing in the end of things.

The depraved old crone, the apostolate of perfidy, the dog-of-the-White-Christ, cardinal Harkady Munnroe Khunestade stood atop his ruined abbey, surrounded by flames and fetid choking smoke as his precious, much beloved sect burned to the ground. His unholy dreams of violence, rape and murder had crashed to his feet, so much detritus to fuel the pyre of his vainglory. His elderly siblings, adult children, adult grand-children and other juvenile descendants, with all their spouses, paramours and whores, man-servants, slaves and chattel were all ablaze. They were being set alight by the ungodly ocher fires that dropped from the morning skies, like pseudo-sunlight from a Fallen deity, to obliterate them without any chance to fight back against the orbiting monstrosity.

Again, the damned governments of the beast-men had struck low the poor, defenseless 'boiz' who just wanted to be left alone to enjoy their vices and debauchery in peace.

WHY?
The monarchs, elected minions, noble bureaucrats and bourgeois merchants all had their own sluts, vices, carnal sins and debauched orgies to attend!

WHY did they need to come destroy theirs?

The cardinal would never receive an answer to his existential question because a series of new ocher beams lanced from the clouded winter skies, striking the cathedral where he stood on the roof’s maintenance walkway, exploding the edifice, turning it to a hail of soccer ball sized projectiles that flew outwards laterally from the point of impact. A minute later, a set of cone shaped azure pulses came down from the white cottony clouds, acting like a sandblaster to pulverize, flatten and grind away to dust the remains of the Khunestade Clan's family sect.

The cultists should have learned the lesson at some point of their existence; you can fight against the government and occasionally win, or run away from their reach, but nobody can fight against REALITY and win anything.

{ SQ } --- { New World order on the march } --- { SQ }

(Star Wars – The Imperial March)

The end of organized right-wing extremism was being worked on diligently, now that the US federal government no longer existed to protect these bastards in the name of ‘Freedom of Religion’, which really meant ‘freedom of giving illegal monies to political candidates’ anyways.

The cure might be harsh to endure, but the disease it removed was so deeply ingrained that no other would work. And just like drug smuggling, you can't simply kill the mules and hope for the best; no, you have to destroy the production facilities to get a permanent result. Churches, cults, sects and revolutionary militias were the same system; they produced then distributed their mental toxin called 'faith', just like drug pills. You had to target no just the visible politos who got elected, but specifically the houses of worship and parochial schools that created these bigoted, demented fools, or else the supply would never dry out.

Like happened with Nazism after World War II; the job was never finished properly.

BUT!

Now, after centuries of misery and suffering at the hands of the ecclesiastes, somebody had the power, tools, and will, to do something about the unholy coterie of religious usurpers that constantly flocked to schools, hospitals and governments to hijack the minds, lives and livelihoods of the populations of the Earth.

And so, no matter how much the clergies and followers screamed or whined, prayed or begged, threatened or pleaded, offered gifts and tributes of glory to their conquerors, the Copernicus space stations worked at their baleful tasks, as set them by their true, and only, master.

Lucas Wolenczak had decreed what the new Reality in progress was to be based on.

The lies of organized religion and sectarianism were finally ending forever.

Power-play backlash

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)
The beige uniformed sailor passed the tray to the prisoner through the wide, but thin, slot in the steel bar door of her cell then did the same with the male prisoner across from the first. The young man's light beige skin matched his uniform quite fetchingly, Cynthia H. Wolenczak thought as she contemplated the potential boy-toy's caramel toned complexion, brown eyes and short dark brown hair that made for an inviting package. Maybe she could find a way to have the twenty-something alone for a while, to get some holiday make-out time to compensate for the dreariness of the accommodations? It was the least the UEO owed her, for all the mess they made out of her life and career at this point.

Not to mention the civil wars going on inside the country.

Whose stupid idea were those?

Didn't they realize that the economy would tank into a recession for a decade before things went back to a simile normal, plus another decade on top to really make things stable anew? Idiots. A population should never let fanatics of any sorts run the government, or this was the thing they could look forward to; war and collapse.

Unrolling the paper napkin that held the cheap organic resin utensils together, she sniffed disdainfully at the thin, watery vegetable soup, even thinner slice of 'meat' that was probably tofu or seitan rather than actual animal matter, porridge-like mashed potato sludge, and off-colored corn kernels. There was a suspicious burnt-dark colored sauce that slathered everything as if to hide the unholy reality of the food underneath.

"What was that Phil Collins song, again? Ah, yes; Another day in Paradise. How ironic," the snobby bitch thought silently about her plight, never realizing that the people depicted in said song had it far worse in one day than her entire life to date.

Self-centeredness and self-delusion always worked together. Her son the certified psychiatrist could have told her that, if she bothered to listen to him sometimes.

Across the empty cell-lined hall, she could see, and specifically hear, her ex-husband plowing through his unappetizing meal as if everything was normal in the best of worlds.

Ewww!

Not only was he an unwashed boor, an uncouth knave and a mannerless cad, but now he proved to be incapable of showing the least little bit of self-control as well. Being jailed was not, of it's self, a valid reason to become less civilized than the normally established standards. Lawrence truly did match Lucas in this part of their attitudes.

(Snort of contempt) Men! Why exactly did she need them to live her life?

Suddenly, the corridor's armored door was violently opened with a loud bang to let pass the rotund simiesque shape of William A. B. Noyce who had come to disburse yet more vitriol upon them. Well, on Lawrence. He was ignoring her, a favor that she was content to return silently as she never wanted to sully herself by interacting with the brutal, barbaric minion of Andrea Dre. Soldiers were
Like valets and chauffeurs; you paid them for a job, not to socialize with them!

Coming to a stop in front of Lawrence Wolenczak’s cell, Noyce smiled widely in a most unpleasant manner, bearing news of a greatly toxic importance. Flexing his arms and fingers, the porcine male had an unholy glee shining in the back of his beady eyes as he contemplated how to best poison the fell man’s life with his delivery. Oh, well. Beauty in simplicity and all that rot.

Extending a leg, Noyce kicked the steel bars of the cell door to give Lawrence a jolt of fear that he was coming in for him. Again. Given the many discolored bruises and scratches littering the tall, thin, man's frame it was obvious that such event would not be desirable. His sudden dropping of the meal tray on the bed to jump away from the door to press his back to the rear wall of the cell was comical to witness, but understandable. Their interactions in the last two days hadn’t been all that civil.

Just as Noyce thought he deserved.

"Oy! Bitch-whore! Listen up, too! This concerns you both! As of late last night, your precious baby boy has finally acquired his much-delayed legal, social, military, political, law-making and judicial statuses under the public agreement of American and Canadian authorities. He now stands as the 'Constable – Governor' of the North-American Mid-Line border zone, and master of the riverine interdiction citadels at Sarnia and Sault-Sainte-Marie. That includes emancipation, diplomatic immunity, etc..."

Lawrence raved madly in the immediateness of the moment "Are you fucking mad? Who in their right minds would allow such a blasphemy against MY WILL? I’m the adult here, not him! I never allowed this! I refuse it! Cancel the damned moronity and bring the boy back to my authority NOW!" he screamed at the top of his still aching lungs. He had screamed quite a lot recently, and he wasn't as capable of shouting rabidly as he had been in the past. Since Noyce was directly responsible for those screams, it could have been safer for the felonious parent to just shut up, but strategic thinking had never been his strong suit in life.

Cynthia watched silently from her cell bunk as their captor, wearing an ever-growing smile of evil glee, joined his beefy, pudgy hands over his rotund belly, looking even more like one of those humanized gorilla figures that populate asian cartoons for kids. Seen from the side, he truly did look like a cross between a fat prosperous Buddha and a huge hairless albino monkey, with all the manners and deportment of such subhuman. Making a noise of distaste, the refined woman remained seated as she set her tray aside on the miniature table next to the bed, bolted to the cement wall. She waited until her rampaging fool of an ex-husband had run out of steam to make her move.

"Excuse me, admiral Noyce." she calmly stated during the first silence to happen.

She was mildly surprised when the swinish male turned towards her, showing a different profile that reminded her mostly a a wild boar, from this angle. Hum... how could this – thing? – be reminiscent of so many of the worst animals and traits she knew, all in one single being? A conundrum for later, when she sat home with her favorite white wine in hand.

"I'm quite certain you will be thankful for my interrupting the Mongol Horde that was tramping around the other cell, admiral, but I do have matters of legal and political importance to address with you." she declared, snobbish, bitchy, and assured of herself as always when speaking to men of power. It was her daily routine, afterall, and she knew which tune made them dance, so it wasn't much of an effort.

Making an even less human smile than before, William approached her steel bars, hands still joined over his ample paunch, bald head glistening in a light sheen of sweat that seemed to be his malevolence osmotically emanating from his pores, and leaned forward just a bit, just enough to
looming over her.

"Yes, my dear Dame?" he asked, oozing fake charm and false concern all over her person, as he very obviously enjoyed having power over them both.

Putting on her own fake smile and professional mask, Cynthia replied coldly "As you are well aware, my son, the only procreate and legal heir of my estate, has just acquired legal emancipation as an adult ahead of the age of majority. Further more, his newly revealed functions, positions and titles enact diplomatic immunity amongst the North-American Confederation, plus all its allies, and the UEO at large. Thusly, as per the laws of Diplomatic Immunity in the Geneva Conventions, and UEO Treaty of 2017, I hereby claim my own Immunity, as first-degree relative of said young man. Release me at once, or suffer the consequences in court martial, for unlawful arrest, unlawful detention, breach of diplomatic statuses, and many more." she finished in complete assurance of her brilliance.

The smile that Noyce answered with had no humanity left in it, and made her shiver in fright as she wondered what it was she had forgotten that could make the piggish lout think he had outwitted her at her own game. No matter; she would deal with it back at the office, in Buffalo.

Suddenly, a burst of short sadistic laughter emerged from Noyce that scared both prisoners into paying him far more attention than before. They then saw that the older man was far from angry or despondent at letting go of his pain toys. Instead, he seemed greatly rejoiced by the prospect.

"Oh, you poor fools!" the bald, fat sailor exclaimed in gleeful cruelty, "You truly think such a simplistic, childish ploy will save you from my clutches?" He broke out in crude, harsh laughter anew, holding his vast sides as his fat body heaved with mirth that promised no happy end for them.

Calming down, Noyce explained to them the lay of the land. "For a professional lawyer, and a man used to dealing with international treaties, you sure are a pair of idiotic buffoons of the lowest order, aren't you? You can't claim diplomatic immunity like that, she-slut! The holder of the title or job that bears the immunity is the one that extends it to you, with a written & sealed document sent to the State Department of the host nation, for recognition or refusal. Only then does it become binding."

Lawrence shouted over them "The fucking little minion will never sign anything for us! He'll let us rot in here, and be happy with it! See what kind of depraved thing you gave me for a child, you mangy bitch!"

Before the ex-wife could reply, Noyce exploded in laughter even more raucous than before. Wiping a tear of unholy joy from his left eye with a sausage-like finger, he then wagged said digit at Cynthia, chiding her none-too-gently.

"You are a pretentious, jumped-up, uppity little cock-sucker of a back-alley whore, Cynthia, not the much vaunted grand maven of society, riches and elite status that you dream of acquiring. In fact, your son has already acquired all that you crave years ago, right under your nose, and you weren't even awake enough to see it happening. Ah! I'm going to enjoy this part of my job..." Noyce sighed in pleasure, his visage sporting an indiscernible emotion that made the prisoners shiver in fear.

"My good guests of the UEO's finest dark pit, your dear, and much maligned, teenaged son has indeed extended diplomatic immunity to you both, since yesterday night when we sealed the deal. We were simply asked to keep you here, in absolute lack of comfort and amenities, until a mode of transport was available to ferry you over to him, at Sault-Sainte-Marie citadel."

'Nooooo!' Lawrence screamed in raw fear, finally understanding the trap.
"What?" Cynthia asked dumbly, unable to process that her plan backfired in her face so easily.

Noyce was all ablaze with pleasure and cruelty as he explained their new reality; "Well, you see, when a foreign diplomat commits crimes, he doesn't get jailed in the host country... No! Instead, he gets RECALLED by the home country to face the government, and courts, of the nation that emitted his diplomatic visa and immunity. Only THEY have authority over him. Therefore, Lucas has acted as a responsible leader of a lawful country (or province) and issued a formal recall of you both. One of his sea planes is arriving later in the day to collect you for repatriation back to SSM, in Canada, to be handed back to him in person, as HE is the AUTHORITY that granted your immunities."

"You are putting us in the hands of the monstrous bastard that did this to me?" Lawrence shrieked in a paroxysm of mixed fear and rage, as he pointed at his disfigured head with both hands quivering in absolute fright.

"You doom us to torture and death, if you send us to him!" Cynthia tried to plead, desperate.

"I know!" Noyce replied, ever gleeful. "Oh, but I know that well!" he laughed dementedly as he swept dramatically out of the corridor, slamming the armored door shut in his wake, leaving the prisoners to drown in their despair of events to come.

Peaceful times, for now

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 13:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 10:00am
Pointe aux Pins, WAC's complex
Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, Canada

Lucas awoke by himself from natural rest, happy to not have needed sleep aids, analgesic cream or worse, full-body effect drugs, for leg cramps or other aches last night after everything was done. This was his first full sleep cycle without chemical assistance in a long time, and he was glad of it. Stretching slowly in contentment under the thick pile of comforter and sheets, the teenager enjoyed the soft feel of the fabrics and the gentle warmth emanating from the massive wood burning fireplace that dominated the external wall of the bedroom. The Victorian limestone beauty was flanked by large thick wooden double french doors on each side that lead to a private balcony, high above the enclosed rear courtyard, on the same level as the manor's main roof line. This deep and wide terrace was in fact linked to the main house by a pair of thin crenelated stone walkways that went around the tower's body to connect with a system of similar walkways that were installed all around the manor. Reminiscent of medieval castles and their embattled patrol paths atop walls, these masonry balconies were built to facilitate both the maintenance of the many complicated gabled roofs, and the household defense by having elevated positions for riflemen to hide in at multiple levels. In a less darksome, or paranoid, view of events, this simply served as a system of very sturdy fire escape routes that would not burn as the stonework and cement were not combustible.

Keeping his eyes closed despite that the curtains were closed and the room dark, the young man took his time to luxuriate in the feeling of peace, calm and safety that permeated his mind. He knew from painful experience that it wouldn't last much longer, as the world was still collapsing, multiple societies imploding unto the hordes of uneducated credulous fools who elevated priests as their leaders. With churches, sects and cults defunded into poverty, alongside the many governments also
stripped of monies for having maintained religious or racist societal projects, it would take decades before the planet healed itself. Decades during which Lucas would need to labor strenuously to help repair what he broke, as nobody would bother with the truth, nor looking at who was really guilty before they placed blame for causing the mess.

Atop of all that, those truly guilty were dead; why then bother pointing at them, when the little jew-boy was alive and rich enough to pay for all the punishments the guilty had accrued? Honesty be damned, if it meant the governments and populations could rebuild simply by stealing his life and heritage.

Opening his eyes at last, the young male sat in the wide king-size bed, propping himself against the massive engraved and painted headboard, with the tall wooden built-in structures on both sides. Blinking a few times as he adjusted the sheets so they climbed up his chest up to his neck to stay warm, the genial adolescent gazed curiously around the vast richly appointed bedroom, the only dim light in the room coming from the monumental masonry hearth, through the cast iron filigree doors. The few shapes he could discern showed the venerable age of the furniture, made of heavy hard woods, replete with relief carvings and colored inlays so appreciated in the 1800's and 1900's, both in Europe and North-America alike.

There were a few odd shapes that he recognized as glass oil lamps or brass candelabras. On each side of the bed were narrow but tall roll-top desks with a hutch mounted on top that served as bookcase and pigeonholes for letters. Next to the desks but farther from the bed were small vanity tables, for sitting in front of an articulated mirror to set jewels and hair for the day, without needing the bathroom facilities. The bed's footboard was a tall ornate thing, surmounted by a trio of cast iron candle holders. Hidden from his view in this angle, he knew that the entire footboard served as backrest for a large wooden box-seat in which sheets, comforters and pillow cases were stored after laundry was done.

Also visible in the sparse light were the pair of mobile wooden 'valet' frames where the manor's waitstaff would normally assemble the clothing needed for the coming day or important events if meetings, galas, or traveling out of the grounds were to occur. In this case, given that he had almost nothing of his at present, the night shift valet had only been able to set out his black jeans, one of his many flannel shirts and whatever shorts and T-shirt were on top of his suitcase when he opened it before sitting for his meal. Closer to the fireplace was a 'U' shaped conversation area composed of a large sinfully plush 5-seat couch in the middle, with a wingback sofa then a settee on each side. This arrangement had the settees pushed back along the walls near the french doors, the sofas more inside at an angle, then the couch acting like a huge wooden berm to anchor the scene. Given that the heavy wooden backboard of the couch was in every way as ornate as the rest of the room's structural elements and furniture, it was like having a framed piece of art put on display that way intentionally. The conversation area was completed by five small, low legged, round mahogany drinks tables that were moved close to people as necessary by the servers. Parked against the left wall, a 3-tiered wheeled serving cart made of mahogany with brass fittings held some alcoholic liqueurs in their retail bottles, crystal tumblers and stem-glasses, and a solid sterling set for hot drinks, including three alcohol burners to have tea, coffee and chocolate available at the same time.

The bedroom's entry door was on the bed's left hand side, on the same wall as the headboard. It was actually a corridor that went through a tall, long, six feet wide vaulted passage until it reached the public zone of the tower, near the main body of the manor. There, in that central chamber, were showcased the equally monumental grand masonry staircase wrapped around an old iron-framed Otis elevator built at the same time as the manor's basic plumbing and electricity, when the entire house was raised. The elevator was wrapped in stained glass panels, and the cabin was wide enough for 4 wheelchairs or 2 wheeled gurneys to ride together. On each side of the floor's agora were stout wooden doors reinforced with iron plates that lead to the manor's roof line walkways so that the
janitors and contractors didn't have to trudge through the enclosed rooms to access their work sites. As he had arrived on the floor by the elevator the night before, Lucas had seen that there were three 'Master' grade bedrooms on the floor, side by side, and tucked away behind the staircase / elevator combo were a public toilet room and small janitor's closet, the contents unseen to date.

On the right hand side of the wall where he was reclining was the door that led to the private en-suite bathroom. This he had used so he knew it was equipped with two large built-in cedar closets, two vanities with sink and mirror, a single large claw-foot bathtub, and two separately enclosed toilets.

All in all, the room was luxurious, rich to the point of obscenity when Lucas thought of the epidemic of poverty that had struck the USA in the last 20 years, causing record numbers of homeless persons to haunt the abandoned sectors of large cities. Back in San Francisco, a recent survey from 2018 had declared that anybody (household) earning less than 175,000$ a year could be considered too poor to afford even a cheap rented apartment inside the municipal limits. There were places in Los Angeles and San-Fran that had become ad hoc tent villages because hundreds of destitutes had assembled to try to help each other when nobody else would. When the teenager compared the salaries he granted his employees, between 3% and 6% better than the competing companies in his sectors of activity, he knew full well that even they had trouble to pay their monthly rents unless they shared as a family or roommates. That was the main reason why he had become so enamored of the Wise Family's manorial system so fast; it allowed him to offer housing as part of the salary instead of paying out a foolish amount that would then be wasted between rent and taxes for almost no services at all.

Looking over what few details he could see in the twilit room, the boy still couldn't help but feel a pang of misplaced guilt from having inherited so much gilded splendor and pompous ornament, despite all that he had endured since to earn it in his own name.

Giving himself a mental shake and pat-down, roughly running a hand through his blond mop of hair to untangle it from the sleep-mess it usually became, the genial teen squinted at the surroundings to orient himself before pushing off the sheets to get out of the high bed. Thankfully, he remembered that the obscenely large bed was mounted on a decorative dais that raised three steps above the carpet covered masonry floor. If he had forgotten that, he might well have face-planted into the floor right on the first step, making a fool of himself. With injuries too, if his usual luck with his legs held out. Dressed only in his ordinary plaid boxers and a thin pale blue T-shirt, the boy stood by the bed, testing out his legs, then his lower back, assuring himself of his body's reliability before grasping his armament-cane as he stepped away from the solid support of the bed's heavy wooden frame.

Moving over to the small desk on the right side, which was the 'Master' side since it was closer to the bathroom doorway, he sat on the small straight-back wooden chair and extended a hand to the open desk, searching for the buttons. His agile fingers having found what he sought, he closed his eyes and let his acute eidetic memory guide his gesture to push the round brass button that would sound a bell in the servant's guard station so that the valet on duty would come to assist him. Not that he needed physical assistance presently, but he wanted to order his breakfast before taking a short bath, that way the food would be ready on his table when he arrived at the private research office, higher in the tower. It took just a few seconds less than five minutes for the staff to arrive after his call; a nice delay that allowed him to don the bathrobe waiting for him on the 'valet' stand, then sit again properly with both hands on the cold sharp pommel of his weaponized cane. Not too long, but not so fast as to indicate that the servants' watch room was on the same level, so he did have genuine privacy in this area.

Unfortunately, it also meant he could be murdered or tortured slowly and nobody would hear it happening, so he would have to prepare for the thoroughly predictable moment when such an event would visit his poor, beleaguered self. After meeting the likes of Angus MacGyver and Jack Dalton face to face, he knew better than to think the men to breach the manor's layered defenses hadn't been born yet. Plus the rest of DXS field forces, and the NCIS agents too, weren't pushovers...
Honestly, Lucas was not particularly surprised to see Raphael Chadderton answer his call, alongside the equally young male valet who had the duty shift for the afternoon. Not that he thought the young man was kissing up to him, but given his position as Butler, it was normal for him to want to maximize his exposure to his new 'Master' until he were familiar with the employer's necessities, not to mention his temperament. The unnamed valet, clear caucasian white skin, blue eyes and rust red hair, was following behind the butler with his hands joined behind his back, silent unless spoken to, as per the old protocols in vigor in such rich, storied households.

"My Lord Constable - Governor, doctor Wolenczak." Raphael addressed him formally, from the far side of the bed, near the entry into the privacy of the bedding chambers. Giving a shallow bow of the neck, the young adult queried "How may we serve, Lord?"

Snorting at all the imperiousness of the situation, the teenager tapped the butt of his cane on the carpeted floor loudly, giving an amused mock-glare at the pair. "You could start by coming close enough that I can see the pair of you, since the lights are clearly not lit enough for polite conversation. Also, I absolutely abhor shouting like a spoiled brat throwing a tantrum in a shopping mall because he didn't get his toy of choice, so get here that we can use 'inside' voices."

Obviously amused as well, the two young servants walked around the bed's dais to stand three feet away from their employer, but next to the large couch's backboard to give him maneuvering room if he wished to stand from his chair. It was well known he had injuries and mobility issues with his legs, so the waitstaff had been instructed to never be in front of him as that could make him falter in his steps. It was better to be sideways to his person so as to catch him by the arms on his way down, if he felt faint or his lower limbs faltered.

Leaning backward in his chair, the medical prodigy lined up his thoughts. He knew from experience at managing both his electronics company, and the Wise conglomerate later on, that employees low on the totem pole preferred short, concise instructions with clear pass/fail criteria because that removed objectivity from their performance evaluations. This in turn made it hard for bullying supervisors and ass-kissing foremen or directors to botch their job reviews without lying outright, which usually was pretty easy to prove. Since Lucas himself truly despised bullying and abuse of power because he had been victimized by it his whole life, he would act in the manner that helped his employees to help themselves the most, thusly of course helping him along the way as well.

"I want to take a short bath to wash off the rest of the grime from my long road of yesterday. And the prolonged contact with lawyers in an enclosed cabin. The stench still hasn't worn off. That means that I need to have my brunch delivered to the private tower office, upstairs, at 14:00pm. Have all the fireplaces lit with cast iron trellis opened, all curtains pulled, and any dust covers that aren't over scientific equipments or exposed artworks removed so the place looks actually lived-in."

The boy gave a small frown as he reprimanded "I don't know why, but last night when I arrived, most of the room was still shrouded in dust covers except the bed itself, and even that was just the bare mattress. The hearths in the main room and bathroom were both inert, and no wood, coal or other fuel in the side niches reserved for such. It's a lucky thing we have electricity in this old manor, because I could see that the oil lamp reservoirs were bone dry, too. And not even an emergency candle in place anywhere either, despite at least four hand-held candelabras plus those three iron sconces at the bed's footboard. This household was designed to function without electricity, not be dependent on it! I expect that, from now on, all non-electrical mechanics, plumbing and hearths be cleaned, texted and furnished back to full service, even for those that aren't in daily usage. If an emergency strikes, we will need all the light, heat, hot water and such as the boilers and stoves can provide. Since we are facing the depths of winter, that should have been evident. The bloody civil war on the southern side of the border, on its own, should also have woken up the managers to the necessity of readying all the traditional, non-electric and non-computer devices for constant usage, as
Pursing his lips in disapproval, Lucas ordered firmly "Now; I want to know WHY it was that, despite almost 24 hours of advanced warning, and at least the 7 hours of the flight from Vancouver, that nothing was done in advance to make what is MY private – and reserved – apartment livable. Was there a confusion in the orders you received? Were there any orders at all?"

Raphael could tell, despite the soft twilit ambiance of the plush chamber, that his employer was neither amused nor impressed by the reception he got last night. Sighing deeply to gather his wits because he realized he'd need them when speaking with this younger male, he signaled at the valet to pull the thick drapes covering the french doors, then open up the fireplace's decorative spark-shields. As the other adult worked diligently, the Butler folded his hands before him, speaking in clear but deferential tones; this boy was a known killer, mass-killer and area-destroyer, so angering him was definitely not in the plans for today.

"On behalf of the household staff, I apologize for the insult given you in your own home, sir. We were told by the lawyers who went to assist you in Vancouver that the likelihood of you staying in the manor for any prolonged period was... Negligible?... I believe was the term the senior member used. He told our Majordomo that you would probably get off the plane to breathe some fresh air, shake your legs awake, maybe have a small meal in the hangar's cafeteria, but not actually stay for any length. We were informed, badly obviously, that your plans were to head back to Wise H&T manor in Buffalo, as you consider that your true, permanent home. Since the principal administrative offices and legal department of WAC's are all centered in Buffalo, that declaration did not seem implausible."

Pursing his lips in thought, Lucas crossed his legs at the ankles, enjoying that he could commit the small act without suffering lancing pains shooting through his entire body for once. Looking at the Butler straight in his eyes, the teenager explained "The lawyers lied. They are, the three of them plus several others in their cabinets and departments, attempting to complete what they have spent nearly 5 decades to put in place. Namely, the defraudment and extortion of this company from my hands, all the while hoping that their friends in the governments of the USA and Canada would keep me too occupied, or worried, to look at their depravities too closely. In truth, I don't know how close to the Abyss we are at present, but I can guarantee that the theft of the conglomerate has been completely stopped. Now I have to learn the events of the past, study the situation as it is, and eventually reverse all the harm they did. I was planning to speak of this with you and the Majordomo in two days' time, after my birthday had passed with a modicum of peace." Shrugging indolently, the genius waved it away "So much for that dumb idea, that I could have any peaceful, quiet time in my life."

Blinking slowly twice, Raphael nodded that he understood the situation. He repeated the basic orders he had received for the meal time and preparing the apartments, then took the actual food order for the cooking staff. At that point, Lucas was informed that there was a separate, private kitchen inside the tower that serviced only that part of the building. It was in fact located on the floor just under the master bedrooms where they stood, along the waitstaff's guard room. So, if Lucas ever wanted to find a servant he could always just go visit there, if the comms were broken or he got no answers. F.H.Wise had been a consummate workaholic who could stay awake 30 to 40 hours at a time since a young age, so the design of the manor's tower had been built to this specific need. This wasn't a detail present in the older houses built by the Wise clan, like the original in Buffalo, the Ramshackle House in New York, nor the Bramble Manor near Boston, as they had all been built before the man was born or had been intended, like the Boston terrain, as a gift to his wife's family for allowing her to marry him.

At this point, the young valet spoke, showing he had a good stable voice that didn't grate on nerves or echo in the room annoyingly. The man asked his employer if he needed anything else, including
assistance in the bathroom to move into and out of the claw-foot tub. Lucas resolved the situation by picking up his smartphone from the charging block on the desk, activating the system and then tapping an app icon while aiming the device at the pair of males besides him. Two beeps later and he could see that his automated sweep & scan program had detected their own phones, filching the official user numbers, the confidential factory number, the GPS & RF ID tags, plus all those personal informations the young men had entered into their OS to create their own profile. After barely 7 seconds, Lucas had enough to have a full contact sheet on each, including several key data like their list of emergency contacts and the passwords they used to lock their phones from attempts at data theft.

Glancing up from the screen to his employees, the boy smirked brattily, telling them "I really need to design and put out for all of our workers a standard phone & tablet combo that has – some – security in them from the start. I was able to swipe everything you guys have inside 7 seconds, and do a full clone of each phone, by airwaves mind you, in around 14 seconds. Those retail sold thingies you have are pathetic, and a clear threat to the data safety of the company. Not to mention I like my privacy, and my personal life is confidential, not fodder for the tabloids or the web's conspiracy peddlers."

Opening up the scheduling app in his phone, the teenager hummed softly as he moved items around, clearing some time to concentrate on this specific issue in the coming days, before it managed to hit him in the back. As for the costs of building then handing the units for free... Well, given the economics in the USA and Canada right now, it wasn't like he could find buyers willing to pay for what he would make. Besides, Wolenbahn had never been an actual player in the public cellphone market; the machines Lucas created for sale were specifically marketed to closed clienteles like hospitals and research laboratories that needed certitude that their devices didn't emit radiation or unwanted radio or cell waves that could interfere with sensitives processes in progress. The criteria of data access & device security were usually secondary for the majority of the organizations that bought his computers, or had been until the World Bank had become his principal client for hardware and software. The Bank specifically focused on data management apps, firewalls, client file encoding, and such.

Making a 'wooshing' motion with his left hand, Lucas waved the men away to their assigned tasks, telling them that he would call them on their personal phones if he needed help. Since he planned on staying inside the tower itself for the rest of the day, he wouldn't even need a guide through the manor until tomorrow at the earliest. With those last second instructions given, the medical genius walked into his private bathroom for a quick clean-up to face the half-day left in front of him.

Mournful times

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 13:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 10:00am
SeaQuest DSV
The Great Eastern Split, USA

Silently like the hearse at the head of a funeral procession, the great gray & blue bulk of the UEO's first flagship cleaved through the icy salt waters that had filled the cataclysmic fault-line of the Great Eastern Split barely a day and a half ago. The massive submersible's only detectable trace were the many powerful searchlights that dotted her hull, the projectors slowly pivoting their heads to focus
harsh white beams along the bottom and sides of the newly created trench as the ship advanced on its somber task.

Surrounding the hulking giant were the six WSKRS satellites that constantly fed the ship critical depth, girth, current and temperature data to insure a clear passage. Alongside the front satellite were the four SeaCrabs that intercepted and shredded large debris that still floated so it didn't hit their ships or equipments. Occasionally, the four Hyper Reality Probes were seen as they placed small metallic poles loaded with cameras, sensors and radios to control sea floor movements and traffic, bolting them solidly to any flat surface that jutted from the sea bed or canyon walls. As the wireless beacon poles were installed, a complete picture of the new rivers and sea floors came to life, being broadcast to all the institutions of the UEO and the surviving authorities of the USA.

The new sea ways had floors that were remarkably unequall, strewn with protruding jagged peaks of hard bedrock, so sharp that they could easily slash open the main ship's hull like a can of tuna or impale the SeaCrabs like scallops on a roasting skewer. The omnipresent problem of these rocky outcroppings was compounded by the fact they created a mess of multiple, and often clashing, currents and turbulences all over the lowest 300 feet of depth near the sea bed. Sending anything smaller than a SeaCrab would result in it being swept away by the strong sub-waves like stray leaves in an Autumn wind. Thankfully, the ship's computers had automated algorithms that fed data and warnings to the navigators and planners, warning them well ahead of any foolish decision to inspect the tumultuous sectors of the canyons they encountered.

Sitting deeply ensconced in his command chair since the beginning of the afternoon shift, captain Bridger was happy to be able to practice fully the sciences and skills he had spent decades refining to a high art. Marine ecology, marine topography, current & channel surveying, all were quite specialized and even the US Navy had precious little use of them, unless they were designing a new class of ship. The veteran sailor was saddened by the circumstances of the job, but still, it beat staying alone and isolated on his tropical island. As well as being an accomplished naval architect and engineer, Nathan had been an avid student of the natural marine environment since grade school, and an ardent proponent of responsible usage of the seas when he enlisted in the naval service.

Now, four decades on, a decorated and respected sailor, serviceman, and innovator whose inventions had made him both rich and well known, the old man could whelm all his learning and accomplishments to the level of instincts as he gazed at the charts and data columns. A few decimal points here or there could indicate unstable rock formations reaching their point of fracture, so the convoy should avoid them, or even use the SeaQuest's beam weapons to topple them in a controlled manner. A pattern of colored lines in the charts seemed to indicate safe waters for submerged navigation, but this was winter and the gigantic pit dug by the nuclear explosions had not completely cooled down to the lowest depths. Those temperature variances, punctual and seasonal, meant that the computer generated map was off laterally by about a dozen feet too wide, and the bottom by around 30 feet too deep.

Nathan used the plastic stylus tipped with a rounded crystal nib that was hard-wired to his console to manually correct the charts and maps, adjusting dimensions, color codes, and notating dangerous points in the geography scanned by the WSKRS and sensor poles. The veteran mariner was so deeply concentrated on is task that he didn't hear commander Hitchcock calling his name until the third time the woman spoke. Blinking owlishly at his subordinate, he set the stylus back in its stand, using a finger to push the 'save' and 'compile data' virtual buttons on the touch screen before addressing the younger woman.

"Well, commander, it's another dreary day under the waves for us." the senior officer quipped in morose tones, affected by their duty as the rest of the crew. "What can I do for you?" he queried gently.
The younger officer smiled at her superior, subconsciously comparing his less aggressive and more cerebral style of command than her previous CO's who seemed to think brashly shouting orders around the bridge made them better than everybody. This older man was a much better temperament to command, and wield, a ship with the 'Swiss army knife' disposition that SeaQuest had, and the complicated highly skilled crew she carried.

"I apologize for bothering you when you're so deep in your math, sir, but the morale officer would like to speak with you, at your convenience. It's about the holiday celebrations, and if you plan to make something official or keep it to individual choice, this year. Given the state of society, politics and the UEO leadership being in a snit... Well, lieutenant Krieg didn't know if he should prepare the mess hall and leisure lounge or just arrange a special Yule cake to supplement the regular daily menu."

Nathan took off his glasses, rubbing the bridge of his nose as he closed his eyes to rest them from the hour of intense data crunching he had done. One of many bad habits from his former professional years that were coming back at a gallop was the ability to drown himself in his work, to the point of dismissing reality around his table if it wasn't germane to the project at hand. That usually meant he forgot to hydrate, or eat, or rest his eyes and mind periodically to avoid a stress headache. Being naturally a perfectionist and adverse to quitting a job that wasn't finished could play havoc on his body if he didn't measure his efforts better.

And now, the political, social and religious hot potato of the winter holidays to manage. Fortunately, for this sort of situation, captain Bridger had a ready-made solution that he could easily apply, without making a mess or insulting anybody in these sordid, harrowing times. He leaned back into his plush chair, looking at the screen dedicated to the PAL network, where all the names of the officers aboard were listed with their current status; sleep, off-shift, vacation, on-shift or sick-bay. That made it easy to decide who to call for a problem without bothering somebody who already put in his hours.

Since Krieg was part of the standard day shift, he was back from his lunch and listed as active. Nathan simply put his finger on the name line and the system did the rest to dial the link.

"Ben Krieg, quartermaster, what can I do for you?" answered the voice of the younger man when the signal linked to his PAL unit. The ambient noise made it clear he was in one of the ship's cargo holds, taking care of moving pieces of equipment that were needed to assemble the sensor poles being bolted to the sea floor and canyon walls.

"It's captain Bridger, lieutenant. I was informed that you requested a talk with me. You can meet me on the bridge around 15:00pm, or I can find you when I do a round of the ship before dinner around 17:00pm. Either should be correct." the senior officer spoke firmly, to be heard over the noise from the pole manufacturing going on around Krieg.

The quartermaster responded "I could see you on the bridge for your coffee break, then. Just remember I like mine with 2 and 2. And keep Cathy away from the muffins, I want one." the man's genuine friendly humor coning through clearly.

"I'll keep that in mind, mister Krieg. Bridger out." the senior officer answered simply as he closed the link.

Nathan shook his head, wearing an amused smile as he exchanged a look with Katherine Hitchcock who was still standing by his side. The woman seemed exasperated by her ex-husband's constant finding of fun and humor in everything these days, but kept quiet about it. "Anything else, commander?" the veteran asked her while wearing an amused little smirk.
"No, sir. That was it. However, I was asked by the Ex-O of the Nimitz if you plan on attending the flag-level officers' Yule dinner aboard the carrier. The admiral seems to have his crew putting a lot of efforts in making it welcoming for the bosses of each ship. I was told that even the captain from the private cargo lander was invited. They would need an answer before 21:00pm tonight to prepare everything for tomorrow evening."

Bridger closed his eyes again, groaning in misery as he remembered the finer points of what being part of a large structured institution involved. Including all the mandatory meals and events with the blasted brown nosing of subordinates, pointless socializing to impress comrades, and sycophantic minionesque suck-upping of superiors were more insipid than the piss-tasting cheap wine coolers. And now he had to do it all over again, with the added stress of dealing with a collapsed government, a brainless higher command that didn't know who was in charge back home, and the UEO that thought they ruled Earth like newly anointed cardinals in a new religion.

Meh! What a shitty mess.

But it was his shitty mess, and one he'd willingly walked back to, with his eye wide open.

Time to assume the full functions and privilege of his office, then.

"Thank you for the reminder, commander. It was probably in the pile of emails that I haven't gotten through yet, just after getting on shift. The mapping needed an expert eye, far more than inter-convoy chatter from old sea dogs, you see, so I put it back. I will..." the senior officer stopped himself mid-sentence as he realized something.

Smirking widely, the captain looked around his bridge, seeing how many more of everything and every officer there was. And the solution then, was pretty simple.

Using the PAL system from the command chair, he spoke to one of the comms officer set in the raised technical hub above the Aqua-Tube. "I need all the details from the admiral's Yule dinner, including transportation methods, schedule, and if I need some sort of speech since I'm the UEO's highest ranking in the convoy. Find out if they have some bigwigs from NCQ or the USA coming for it. And specify to whoever is in charge of the meal that I'm on a dry diet; no alcoholic drinks or foods, but I have no allergies and I like red meat. Bridger out."

Now smiling openly at his Lt-Commander, the older man shrugged indolently. "The only real privilege of being in charge is that I can delegate the small stuff. And it's pretty much the only ability of my office I have no qualms about exploiting, if only to manage my time better, and spare what little sleep time I can get."

Nodding in response, Hitchcock approved the older man's reasoning before going back to her station; the flotsam and debris that littered the sea floor weren't going to catalog themselves, afterall.

Slow motion emotions

(MacGyver – 1985 opening theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 13:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 10:00am
Phoenix Foundation HQ
Los Angeles, California, USA
Standing by himself on the flat roof of the tall building, Jack Dalton observed the six machine gun nests that had been positioned around the perimeter of the edifice. Their director, Mathilda Webber, had decided to put the heavy Browning cal.50 guns on the roof to have both anti-aircraft flak as well as the capacity to stop ground vehicles or pedestrian assault from the elevated positions which were difficult for enemies to aim at from close to the building. The ground floor's vast glass walls all around the building had been shuttered by hidden 20 foot tall steel plates that rose from their secret slots, buried at the foot of each segment of wall, so that even the few normal cement walls or doorways got an extra layer of protection. The underground parking had been shuttered as well, and mobile steel cabins placed at the entry points to serve as defensive gunnery points. The ground floor and parking lot guards were equipped with H&K MG5 (infantry) light machine guns with ACOG sights, giving them up to 1,300 yards of range in 'spray & pray' suppression fire. As a point-shot weapon, the 600 yards range wasn't the best in the world, but that was still much better than the guys with the AR-15's patrolling all around the building and rooftops, who could hope for about 400 yards if they could take the time to aim.

Looking out over the horizon, the 50 year old soldier could see over the vast sprawl of the western districts, all the way to the touristy beach districts and the harbor where a pair of lonely US Navy cruisers stood guard at the entry to the navigation lane. Beyond that, in the open seas near the port inways were parked several dozen ships that had arrived in the last five days, despite knowing full well just how lawless and dangerous the USA had become in less that a week. Because the ships that crossed the Pacific usually carried only enough supplies to last the estimated travel time plus 10 to 12 days extra in case of storms or mechanical accidents that caused delays, turning back towards Asia was impossible, and aiming for other ports along the USA’s western seaboard would still have the same problems. Unfortunately, several transoceanic ships could only anchor in deeply dredged waters like those of Los Angeles, San Francisco or Seattle; going anywhere else would mean anchoring the ship in fully exposed blue waters near a town devoid of any capacity to help large boats. Here, they were exposed in the open ocean, yes, but they had several US Coast Guard ships and small skiffs available for protection, and the possibility of machinery parts to fix problems, as well as the fact the National Guard was organizing food supplies to help them plan for the trip back to their ports of origin.

Turning left, Jack could see the heavily computerized mounting for a wheeled missile battery holding 6 Sidewinder air-interception missiles ready to fly. The thing would normally be towed behind a Hummer in an open field, but this time it had been manhandled to the roof by a mobile crane barely big enough to lift the whole assembly in one go. Presently, Riley Davis and Jill Morgan were busy at work, their heads stuck deeply inside the wiry guts of the machine, repairing or optimizing God-knew-what that he had no chance of understanding. Something to do with the IFF beacons of friendly planes having been spoofed? He was a bit fuzzy on the details but it didn't matter anyways; it wasn't like he'd be the one to finish the job if they got bothered with something else.

Stepping closer to the mid-chest height perimeter wall that served as banister all around the roof, Jack tried to breathe in some fresh air, but only ended up scrunching his nose in distaste. All he got for his troubles was a lungful of polluted industrial smells worsened by the stench of all the burning buildings, vehicles and dead bodies spread all over the commercial district surrounding the DXS base. Making a face of disgust, the middle-aged man turned away again, trying to find a view to take his mind off the things they knew were coming at them.

They had arrived early in the day, yesterday around 13:00pm, after Lucas Wolenczak had warned them of the attempt by Mosley to hijack and hold hostage their kin. They had all been woken in the wee hours of the night to get informed, pack and get the MD-11C refit back on the tarmac for an emergency flight back to LA. Despite all the urgency, it had taken almost 2 hours to prep the plane and have a time slot free to use the A.F.B. Diefenbaker runway to take off. The four hour flight had been unremarkable as such things went, if not for the stress that both DXS and NCIS teams had felt,
right until they received final confirmation from Matty that all their people were safely ensconced inside the private armored enclave the DXS had built on the eastern outskirts of LA, in the mid-heights of the mountains that bordered the right-hand side of the city. There had been some hoopla at the John Wayne Airfield when they arrived, because the National Guard unit that had taken control of the airport when they left kept receiving a bad signal from the plane's transponder, so they had to make their landing approach twice before touching ground for good. Then, taxiing to the hangar, deplaning, piling into the SUV's sent over by Matty, and such a joyful (not!) 2 hours to cross the badly damaged, war-torn cityscape...

Yeah, it wasn't the homecoming of their dreams...

And now, here they were again, back at Phoenix HQ to fix the messes other people made, while their new friends and their relatives were still in that walled, gated, private enclave hidden high in the treeline above the city's eastern districts. Jack did not feel like working today; he felt like staying with Diane, Riley and Angus in the enclave so they could take stock of the situation before making the kinds of decisions that would orient their lives for the next few decades. The fact that Diane was being forced into close contact with Elwood, or that Riley was being shmoozed by Billy Colton when time and job permitted, had nothing to do with his gut feelings acting up.

The 'ding' from the elevator's protective shed announcing that the cabin had arrived on the roof level was easily audible since it was barely a dozen feet behind him, the machine opening to let out Angus and Wilt who were pushing a wheeled 4-tier cart filled with parts and tools. Mac, tools & parts usually meant that the kid genius had imagined something, probably Earth-shattering too, and gotten the big boss' go-ahead to put it in action. As the two young adults rolled their loot cart near him, Jack thought he heard something about infrasonic emitters and non-lethal stunning force, but wouldn't bet his life on it. Technobabble wasn't his forte, if you got his drift... However, he could barely keep himself from laughing loudly as the two good friends arrived near his position.

"I'm telling you, man, this will work! And not only will it incapacitate human intruders, it'll stun or repel a bunch of animal vermin as well." Angus posited quite vocally as Wilt seemed to have doubts about the device they were supposed to build on the roof. "And once its proven, we'll be able to install it all around the enclave and the houses to keep animals or looters away as well. Just you see! You'll be thanking me when you don't have to worry about raccoons climbing through the windows to steal your freshly cooked pies and roasts from the kitchen counters." the blond haired scientist predicted quite assured of himself.

"Now boys," Jack interjected with a big smile, "let's not get ahead of ourselves, here." The veteran soldier gestured at the stack of parts and wires, declaring amusedly "I can see now that Matty's worries were justified. Without a proper mission to prepare for, the both of you have a full case of 'devilish hands at play' just itching to make some mischief that involves electricity and fire. Now, if we were talking guns and explosives, I would make it my solemn duty, as the responsible adult in the house, to hold your hand through the process, but, since it's scientsy stuff... Y'all on your own,
especially if the Boss Lady gave you the go-ahead already. I had one techno-geek try to blow my head this passed fortnight, I ain't stayin' around for another try."

Walking away from the twin looks of amusement and ill-hidden scoffs coming from the two men, Jack Dalton walked to the elevator, taking advantage of the cabin being present to hitch a ride down to see the aforementioned Boss Lady about what happened next. The trip to Vancouver was a bust, their NCIS partners had pretty much imploded, and the rest of the country was still not waking up from its self-induced scorched-earth catastrophe. If nothing else came up with Mack and Boze, Jack was going to ask to be put on the patrol detail around the building perimeter, or maybe the materials gathering expeditions that went out every morning. Running a hand lightly over the short stubble that covered his almost bald head, the 50 year old thought glumly about the sorry state of his homeland as the cabin descended down to the ground floor where the director's war room and CIC were located.

Exiting the machine, Jack went straight to the homey comfortable room that looked more like a VIP lounge in a hotel than a spy agency's surveillance & command hub. Normally, he could have easily spotted Matty through the glass walls, but she had ordered that all the internal separations activate their privacy coloration or have opaque cloth curtains in place to lessen the chance of enemies spotting something vital. As such, Jack was navigating guided only by the hope that his old friend hadn't yet moved from the admin meeting she had with her department heads. As luck would have it, Jack arrived just as the wooden door to the room opened to let out the DXS higher execs back to their many tasks. Spotting the shorter silhouette of his employer at the back, near the giant wall-mounted screen, the Delta Forces specialist waited until the room emptied to walk in, closing the door as he entered.

"Jack! Just the jar-head I wanted to see." the middle-aged woman exclaimed while making a vigorous 'get over here' gesture with her empty hand as she took a long pull from her coffee mug. "Aaaaahhh! That feels like Heaven in a can! Gawd but I needed that!" she exclaimed as she cradled the hot porcelain mug to her chest like a drowning woman hanging on to a life preserver on the open seas.

Jack took the hint and fixed himself a mug, thankful for the small Keurig brewer and dry powdered condiments that helped the spies function during long overwatch jobs. For having been on this side of the monitor too many times in his career, Jack knew full well just how nerve-wracking seeing things from afar while being unable to do anything to help could get. Sometimes, the long boring watch duties were much preferable to the short, gut-twisting ones where you saw friends and family put in the crosshairs of amoral bastards. His coffee in hand, the man sat on the sectional couch, near Matty who was still busy at communing with her own warm fuel. The pair took a few minutes of simple, companionable silence as they sipped their liquid comfort before talking about the metaphoric fluorescent pink monster sitting in the middle of the room.

Matty drained her lukewarm drink then immediately brewed herself another coffee before the mug had a chance to cool. Now rearmed for the coming hour, she took the time to look at her friend from head to toes, seeing the same signs of antsiness that many of the professional military and spies that composed the DXS main workforce suffered presently. The techs could find projects to design and build during peace time, but those who were professional fighters needed action to stay calm and satisfied. Welp, she had just the thing in mind.

"Jack, I have a situation that needs some careful consideration before we make our move." she initiated the conversation. "Normally, the directives would come from Overwatch but, well, he's the problem. James has fallen Jack, and we need to go retrieve him. As it stands, we know where he was located when the nuclear blast occurred. Unfortunately that was south of DC, in the 350 - 400 kilometer distance of the secondary effects, when his plane dropped from the sky. We have no signal, no active comms since they were knocked out by the EMP wave from the explosions... Jack,
it's highly probable that Angus' father, my oldest friend, has died on duty and I will have to send you out after a damaged, barely recognizable cadaver." she explained softly, in a sad voice.

Closing his eyes, the soldier asked "What was he doing in that area? I thought he was supposed to stay away from DC, after the Lake Barcroft facilities were breached and the top policing agencies had been beheaded by the Jesus-nuts. What changed to have him move into the hot zone like that?"

Sitting next to her friend, Matty made a vague gesture with her left hand as she sipped some warm courage before answering. "I haven't the foggiest what the reason was. He was the 'Overwatch' and I was the 'official' face of the Phoenix Foundation / DXS to the world. Even to me, he did not, and could not, reveal everything he was privy to. This, clearly, was one of those things it was better to keep inside one single head, and nowhere else."

Dalton mulled it over, before asking "Besides the location of his plane transponder when the blast occurred, do you have any solid proof that he was actually inside the plane, or that it was flying at all? The tin can could have been flying under the radar, preparing to infiltrate the DC defense zone, and that's a survivable drop if there are trees or a body of water underneath when she goes down. We've seen, and lived it, on missions a fair few times ourselves."

Mathilda wrapped both hands around her warm mug, trying to draw strength from it as she explained the details of the situation. "It was a small two-prop plane, 30 years old but well maintained. Diesel piston engines, six seats, 30 cubic feet of cargo space, no amenities... Just the equivalent of a flying Econoline van, but less options and comforts. The pilot was an external contractor James and I had used for almost 25 years now, his parents were old colleagues from our CIA training days. He was loyal to us, and being a son of hindi immigrants, he would never have betrayed us to the Trumpists or their successors. The plane was flying low, at barely 1,000 feet, just like you expect to evade the automated radars. And yes, they were already descending to land at an old private farm, just another 10Km further off so that James could find a ground ride to cover the rest under the cover of night."

Jack rubbed his clean-shaven chin thoughtfully. "A thousand feet drop isn't an easy thing to accomplish if your instruments still work, let alone survive after an EMP fried everything. The good news is that a lot of people from that zone did survive the secondary and tertiary effects if they were sheltered in the least little bit. The bad news is that a plane in flight, even a military one, does not constitute a reliable shelter to ride out a nuke. And since they were headed towards DC, blast-glare blindness of the permanent sort is strongly probable, in the best of cases, unless James was rooting around his backpack when the bombs went off. Even with aviator shades or a flight helmet with a closing visor, their eyes are probably gone, if they survived at all. So, dropping from the sky blind, hurting, under traumatic pain and disorientation from losing their sight like that..."

Both old partners exchanged a look heavy with sorrow and meaning. Now they would have to warn Angus, and he would want to participate in the recovery detail, even though it wasn't the best usage of his talents and mind. This would of course drag at least Wilt into the mess, maybe even Riley if she became stubborn about supporting her almost-brother in his time of need. After the young man had gone to such lengths to help save her mother on repeated occasions, the DXS director didn't see how the female hacker could be convinced to stay behind, inside the sheltered building, until the recovery crew came back with news.

"Welp, there ain't no way this ends well..." Jack quipped forlornly, anticipating how that conversation was going to proceed once the genius tech was called down from the roof. Sometimes, he really hated his job, given what it did to his loved ones.

Visit at the museum
Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 14:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 11:00am
Pointe aux Pins, WAC's complex
Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, Canada

Lucas walked around the large tower's master bedroom on legs that were steady and pain free for the first time in over seven days. It was a great feeling, that freedom of movement and reliable balance that he so hoped not to lose for ever. All he needed was a few days of peace to reach a safe hospital with capable doctors and he would be set for the coming year, maybe even finally free of infections and all the associated ills. Taking a silent, satisfied breath as he closed his button-down shirt's collar to finish placing the bow tie he liked to wear when dressing formally, the teenager contemplated his image in the mirror of the wooden dry vanity console he was standing in front of. He was freshly washed, combed, medicated, and fully dressed in his new brown ensemble he had bought barely a week ago.

He looked like a living, breathing, healthy adolescent boy for a change.

Not dissatisfied by that turn of events, the young man allowed his small shy smile to emerge for a few seconds as he knotted the bow tie at his neck, tugging at the ends to balance it properly. After smoothing the front of his shirt and patting multiple pockets to make certain all electronics were in their proper places, he took the brown jacket from the wooden valet stand to complete the suit, tugging the sleeves to cover his newly crafted defensive bracers. Then he buttoned closed the jacket, patting the decorative leather lapels a bit to make certain the affixed gold pins showing the varied functions, positions and ranks he bore were presented in a serious business demeanor without coming off arrogant or condescending. Happy with the current look since his actual formal 'Constable – Governor' suit wasn't crafted yet, he decided that this could make a good stand-in.

Grasping the pommel of his dreaded armament-cane, he walked to the left hand side of the bedroom to walk out of the chamber to reach the agora. Once there, he touched the thick brass control button for the old Otis elevator, calling the cabin. While his legs were cooperating now, he wasn't foolish enough to think this would last long, especially if he went traipsing wildly around the chilly passages and rooms of the sprawling heap of masonry he now called his shelter. Honestly people, how long could it take to fire up the damned boilers and electric baseboards in this decrepit mausoleum? He had given the orders an hour ago already! There should be some warmth around the place, not thin layers of hoarfrost coating the artful stained glass panes in the windows, nor wisps of white vapor condensing before his mouth as he breathed.

Well, there was no changing this anymore.

The central tower was built according to an old but efficient defensive plan that had the three first levels devoid of external entrances or windows, all such openings in the walls beginning from the third floor above ground. This meant that even the house residents, waitstaff and guests had to climb three floors, somewhere in the manor, to reach the 3rd level then walk laterally all the way to the central (public) wing's grand library, from where a heavy armored door granted access to the central tower's 'official' receiving area. This large luxurious salon was actually built around the level's agora, using the iron framed elevator and stonework staircase as decorative showpieces. There were walls to separate the bathrooms and infrastructure passages from the publicly used living spaces, and two small luxurious cabins that looked like church confessionals but were in fact telephone booths for private calls while waiting on the Lord's arrival. At the far end, several pairs of french doors gave
access to a large stone terrace looking over the rear courtyard, and the river beyond.

All of this architecture had been decided and designed well before the birth of F. H. Wise, from a time when railways and steamboats were not yet reliable for industrial use, let alone domestic. With some historical perspective, Lucas could understand that his ancestors had fled Europe in the early 1800's when racism and religious persecution were rampant, so they had valid fears. But did they really have to be so damned paranoid about everything, to build a damned labyrinth like this? What next? Jaw-traps, spiked pits and minotaur guardians hiding in the maintenance passages?

Walking inside the elevator cabin, the teenager was relieved to see that the brass assembly holding the analog clock-face and old wired emergency telephone had a visually appropriate chart of the tower's floors with a description and button next to each text. This fit with what he had guessed, since he had heard on his first visit, 5 years ago, that the tower had been built by Franklin after demolishing the much smaller original.

{ SQ } --- { What a pile of dirt } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 14:09pm

The current tower was massive at 100 x 100 feet, with 10 foot thick solid dressed stone & brick outer walls that covered an impressive structure of steel 'I' beams, girders and armor plates that created the equivalent of a thin vertical battleship stuck in the ground. The tower's total height was also astounding, given the early epoch of construction, since steel-work was not that advanced back in 1930.

There must have been a modernization program carried out at some point after construction though, since the wired telephone had a brass button keypad and liquid crystal display above the keys, rather than a rotary dial as was usual for the first model phones of those days. Taking the time to read the floor chart, Lucas memorized the numerous levels that would be his primary living and working areas for the foreseeable future. God, that was an impressive list.

Flat stone roof; actually 110' x 110', the roof held 8 long barreled cal.50 machine guns, and a massive parabolic antennae array in the middle.

*** The elevator does not reach the rooftop; it is accessed by the staircase only.

tenth; actually 110' x 110', glassed panoramic war room & comms to cover the entire 'region under authority'.

Ninth; down to 100' x 100', upper machinery & infrastructure hubs, workshop for janitors.

Eighth; Master private medical R&D operating theater with preparation areas.

Seventh; Master research workshop, chemistry laboratory, materials vaults.

Sixth; Master office, private library, conference area.

Fifth; Master bedrooms (3) and access to manor's main roof patrol walkways.

Fourth; kitchen, walk-in pantries, walk-in coolers, servants' waiting room.

Third; middle external access, public receiving area.

Second; apothecary shop, laboratory, private enclosed doctors' cabinets (4).

First; primary emergency bunker for household.
--- Ground ---; private patients' convalescence ward

Basement-1; medical operating theaters (4) & matching preparation areas.

Basement-2; medical equipments, products & drugs, doctors' library.

Basement-3; Secondary bunker with access to manor's other basements.

Basement-4; Staff emergency supplies & preserved foodstuffs.

Basement-5; Master & family's private bunker.

Basement-6; Master & family's supplies & preserved foodstuffs.

Basement-7; machinery & infrastructures, boilers/steam, electrical generators, etc...

*** The elevator's cable drums and gearbox are at this level, besides the shaft.

Foundation plate; armored concrete, 20 foot thickness, fresh water artesian well.

That was a whoppin' 19 levels of armored steel, stone, brick and concrete, with most of it reserved just for the Master of the household, his servants and high-paying private patients. And that wasn't all. Let's not forget that this little gem of decadent old luxury was copied in every detail on the other side of the Saint-Mary river, in Brush Point, USA.

Lucas could imagine, back in the mid and late 1800's when horse-powered ferries was the only way to cross the strong currents of the river; an endeavor that took a long hour in itself, plus the carriage ride to get there, and then another long ride to reach destination... Yeah, Lucas could see why his ancestors had decided that they would double their land holdings to build their properties as twins straddling the border at the important crossing points where they were established. It was a lot more practical, especially in winter when the ferries stopped crossing and no passage was possible until steamships became the standard waterborne transport. The bridges and water locks were built because of the steam power revolution making long-range transports easy, otherwise the governments would have waited far longer before anybody thought it was necessary to invest that much in roadways or waterways.

But even then...

The teenager had lived in the others of the Wise family's massive old glories in Buffalo (home), New York, and visited Boston several times. He had toured seriously the critical production facilities in Buffalo, Detroit, and Thunder Bay despite his young age. But none of them were as big, complicated, or full of old half-hidden secrets as Sault-Sainte-Marie was shaping up to be. Although, probably, given the similar size and large population, the Sarnia complex could match this mess.

Bleh! What kind of crazy house of madness had he accepted control of?

Legitimate, lawful inheritance or not, that would teach him to accept contracts and properties blindly. In his defense though, the young man told himself that even a genius child needed informations and time to make logical choices, and he had been willfully denied both at the time of events. Finally making up his mind to stay in the present, he pushed the button to raise him one floor so he could finally see that blasted private office that would become the center of his life and work.

{ SQ } --- { A stroll amongst old dreams } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 14:13pm
The antique elevator was much quieter than Lucas had realized last night when he had arrived. Then again, he had been so tired that he had barely been able to eat and take a bath without assistance from the valet before falling into bed, dead to the world for ten long hours. One thing the young man noticed that he would have the household staff change quickly was the absence of Braille relief on any of the control buttons or the clock. That had been the same thing for the electrical light switches, water faucets and servant call buttons in the bedroom's facilities.

While he liked his inherited properties to stay as 'vintage' as possible since that kept up the real estate & decoration value, he never accepted anything that made them less safe or detracted from accessibility. He had spent close to 13 months in a bloody wheelchair and used crutches for almost 4 months after that, plus the troubles with his perceptions and attention/focus caused by the head injuries and medications, so accessibility and user friendliness were big issues for him.

As the cabin arrived at the sixth floor smoothly, the adolescent noted that there was neither bell nor tonality, and no synthesized voice calling out the floors & orders that had been activated. More details to correct. The Victorians may have liked their homes to be silent like mausoleums because that kept emotions from being riled, but nowadays people understood that priority should be put on safety and utility, so changes would be made in step to such modernity.

Lucas made a mental note to take pictures with his smartphone of every piece of property or furniture that wasn't fully accessible or usable under limited capacities to have them renovated or replaced inside of the coming year. This plan would simply dovetail quite naturally with the imperative necessity to complete the upgrade plans in progress for telephony & computer/networking across all of his inherited properties that no doubt suffered similar situations due to their age.

Stepping out of the cabin, the teenaged genius could not hold back a snort of amusement as he saw Raphael Chadderton standing stiffly, hands joined behind his back, three feet in front and to the side, of the elevator doors. Feeling good about his health and situation for the first time in close to ten days, Lucas allowed his sense of humor to show as he quipped playfully at the older male, when he walked by on his way to the office proper.

"It's a good thing you came to fetch me at the elevator. This heap of rocks is so damned big, even a genius could lose his way around it! And look; despite that there is just one main room on this floor, there are so many doors all over, which one would I choose? It's like a bloody TV game show, in here! I mean, it feels like an episode of 'The Price is Right' where I get to chose behind which door I get my showcase from, so that I can bid on it."

The butler worked hard to keep from laughing aloud, but couldn't quite repress the big boyish smirk from appearing on his clean shaven face for a few seconds as his employer passed besides him, aiming for the correct doorway already.

"Well sir," Raphael answered back, "It does help that it's the one door that's open, and the smell of the hot food coming from the room would guide you anyways. Hungry kid on gut-pilot and all that..."

The prodigy replied "The smell isn't something I'd follow in this pile of rubble! With so many foodstuff and medicinal products manufacturing stations all over, there's bound to be smells wafting about. Doesn't mean any of it is comestible without a written ordinance from your doctor. Besides, it could be the food for the staff before they go on shift, moving around the old vents. I used to get that a lot at my office building in San Francisco. The diner on the ground floor was right under my lot and the vents weren't segregated correctly, the first year I rented the place. We had a lot of renovations to do it all the right way."

As he entered the Master office, Lucas was almost blinded by the abundance of strong sunlight
streaming from the side wall that didn't orient towards the agora. Unlike all the other floors, this one had been designed with multiple large windows through the thick armored walls all around the office to give it a more lived-in feel, and make all work much easier to accomplish without dragging lamps or candles all the time. Following his feelings for a rare time, Lucas ignored the contents of the room to march directly to the side wall, so he could look over one of the lateral portions of the estate that he hadn't seen yet, just to get a hint at the actual scope of the entire thing.

The windows seemed to all be the same concept; a thick steel frame covered by milled veneered hard wood and a deep cushioned box-bench that spanned the full width. Attached to each window were a pair of heavy pivoting brass brackets that held a one-wick gas lamp, original to the 1930's build. As the teen inspected the brackets closely, he saw that they could also remove the gas-burning nozzle to serve as sconces for torches, candle holders, or even hold aloft oil lamps that had been designed specifically to fit inside the custom fixtures. As part of the manor's modernization in the 1980's when digital telephony was added on all levels of all sectors, someone had thought to add an electrical wire to power a small incandescent bulb inside a decorative stained glass bell hanging from the lower part of each bracket. This clearly limited fire hazards while permitting to link all modern lights in the office to one master switch built near the entry doorframe.

Having looked over the portion of the estate that he was curious about, the young man finally turned around to gaze at the room itself. Standing near the desk was the Majordomo, Erasmus Chadderton, and another young male valet, but neither were important yet.

In terms of decoration, there was the humongous main desk on the right side of the entry door, that was the focal point of the chamber. This was actually 2 massive units that comprised the front and back with the user sitting in the middle of the wooden behemoth. The front portion, was flat except for two steeply inclined boxes that housed the servant call buttons and wired telephone. Centered between the two protuberances were a cork surface protector and a sterling silver pen holder with an old fashioned built-in capped inkwell. The back unit was flush against the wall separating from the floor's agora, and bore a flat surface as well but topped by a massive wooden hutch whose many compartments were covered by wood-framed glass panels. On both units were spread four large Tiffany stained glass electric lamps, set at just the good height for reading or conversation. All the metal fixtures visible from this angle were clearly solid sculpted bronze pieces that gave the ensemble an incredible cultural and monetary value. The Master chair was like a modern throne; a huge wingback swiveling affair, deeply upholstered in a tweed-like brown-beige tone that reminded the color of the suits worn by European and American university professors all through the 1900's.

In front of the desk were four large wingback swiveling chairs reserved for 'formal business' guests like clients or patients. Each chair had a small round drinks table on it's right hand side, high enough to be an inch above the armrests of the swiveling seats. These tables all had a bronze pen holder with built-in inkwell, and small Tiffany stained glass electrical lamp on an ornate bronze stand. Of all the visibly ostentatious luxuries the manor could have, each table had an old wooden wired telephone set that had a rotary dial for outside lines and call buttons for the servants' intercom.

Now that was living like a rich man, back in the day! Each of your guests could have their own private call while you had your own on a separate device, all at the same time. Man, people who saw this must have been jealous of the old guy's obscene displays of wealth right in their faces like that. Then, spread about, were several crank-&-screw inclining drawing tables with built-in drawers, lights and pen holders, several heavy wooden filing cabinets that came to 5 feet high, and a couple of armoires that topped 8 feet in height. In one corner of the office was a monumental fireplace with a conversation area similar to the one in the bedrooms below, and in the opposite corner was a set of thick wooden bookshelves, solidly anchored in both floor and ceiling. At a few places around the room were thick locking glass casings that protected heirlooms or trinkets that Franklin Wise had
valued for unknown reasons, other than the clear monetary worth of such antiques.

On the right side of the entry door, passed the desk ensemble, against the far wall, was the enclosed private lavatory that F. H. Wise used. His guests were instructed to use the two semi-public lavatory cabins that were placed against the left side external wall. In the space next to the entry door's left was a massive wooden console with a 3” thick gray quartz counter-top and tall sculpted wooden hutch that served as wet bar and liquor cabinet. The quartz surface was smooth except for the square cut that had been dug 2 inches deep a 12 inches on each side to serve as shallow basin under the artfully sculpted bronze faucet. Since the taps were only used to rinse glassware and utensils before serving a guest his alcoholic beverage, it didn’t need a deep basin like a kitchen, scullery or butler's pantry would require. The bar was huge, massive, covered in deeply sculpted and engraved work that was clearly made to resemble the style favored by the wood carving masters of Eastern Europe in 1700. Lucas knew enough to realize that this was an imitation, since there wasn’t this type of wire-glass pane or plumbing back in the era that the piece was supposed to emulate. This was clearly a custom item, built for this room.

Next to the bar was a tall wooden armoire, now open, that held the accouterments needed if the master and his guests decided to eat a full meal in the office rather than go to the manor's formal dining room, located in the central public wing. All the fine china porcelain dishes, sterling silver utensils, linens, condiments in glass jars or pots, and other necessities were all neatly organized on the many shelves. Placed unobtrusively next to the open armoire were two small straight-back chairs with thin upholstery that served to seat the servants when they had to wait during their service to the manor's lord.

Finishing his quick overview of the room, Lucas finally paid attention to the small wheeled wooden cart that held several covered dishes set over brass alcohol burners to keep them warm. Other covered dishes were set in the serving cart’s open lower shelf to remain cool. Walking to the Master's chair as it was now his, the teenager mentally griped at the dishonest lawyers who had never let him see this part of the manor when he visited 5 years ago. They had used the excuse of time constraints to corral him to the workshops, manufacturing plants and accounting offices so that he wouldn't get any big ideas about what exactly it was that he had gotten a hold of. He would be revenged for this ignominy.

{ SQ } --- { A meal steeped in antiquities } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 14:24pm

Sitting in the massive plush chair with his cane leaning against the desk itself to keep it in reach, the boy gestured at the valet to begin serving his meal. Looking over at the two Chaddertons, he asked aloud "I do hope you have rested and eaten to your needs; I don't run the type of operation where nobody has any food or sleep unless I do first. Regardless of what tripe the damned lawyers may have been peddling, I don't act like that with anybody."

Making a tight stern smile in response, the majordomo inclined his head minutely as he acknowledged his employer's question, and underlying worries. "Indeed, my lord. We are all well rested and fed, as even your great-grand-father knew the perils of ill-kept waitstaff serving at his table or bed chamber. He was a very austere, severe individual, as was the common manner of powerful men of education, wealth and influence in that post-Victorian epoch. Wealth was demonstrated freely by material things, but temperament and deportment were always kept for the privacy of the mind, never exposed publicly lest it cause disarray in the household, and a scandal in the community. As such, as he reached adulthood and became used to managing the estates and factories, he learned the ways of men who are obliged to work hard through a long day for a meager pittance. Furthermore, in studying the apothecary arts and medicinal sciences, he finally realized that sufficient nourishment,
recreation, culture and peaceful sleep were necessities of human health, not just privileges for the wealthier classes of society. Despite all appearances, the man's managerial style was actually well in advance of his peers in science or industry of the era, enough to be publicly decried as a socialist, or even as a 'proletariat enabler' by the right-leaning press of the epoch."

Lucas almost choked on his first mouthful of coffee as he heard that one. Honestly! F. H. Wise considered as a progressive liberal business tycoon? And a defender of workers' rights? In what bloody reality did they find this? Earth #52? Giving the elderly man a look of clear disbelief over the rim of his very diminutive porcelain cup, the teenager clearly showed he didn't believe that one for a minute. Not after all the private journals and publicly archived company & governmental records that he had managed to lay hands on in the last 5 years.

Gesticulating vaguely with his free hand, the young prodigy indicated that he preferred his two main servants be seated in the chairs in front of the desk rather than standing up all day long. After he had taken his third sip of life-giving coffee, he told them "I will not break my neck or ruin my delicious meal by craning my head up at you all the time. Sit! In the two chairs in the middle, in front of me, not the dingy little things besides the bar. This is for house business anyways, so get to it. I learned to multi-task at a young age, I can eat and follow the pair of you without any accidents."

Wearing matching discrete smiles, the two senior employees sat in the assigned chairs while the junior valet placed on the desk before the teenager a tray laden with two large plates, a bowl and a small empty glass. One plate held 2 fried eggs, 6 rashers of bacon, 1 sausage, a heap of spiced hashed potatoes and 1 thin french crepe rolled tightly. The second plate held 4 toasted white bread slices and a small oatmeal muffin. The shallow bowl contained a generous portion of steaming hot baked beans. As Lucas began to sample small bites of each item to savor them fully, the valet brought the pitcher of orange juice to fill the empty glass, setting the half-full crystal ware besides the cup of coffee which also got a refill immediately. It was becoming apparent that their master's legendary addiction to coffee wasn't overstated, so the staff would see to it that the young man was 'kept afloat' so to speak.

"Where's the podium?" Lucas asked suddenly aware that something was missing from the office setup, despite that he had asked for the installation close to three years ago. "The gaseous display console that was planned for the master office isn't in sight, and it wasn't in the bedroom either. What happened? Did my orders get lost?" he queried tartly, anticipating yet another stab in the back. If they thought they could attack his poor brother's body, they'd get a newsflash of epic proportions!

Shaking his head sadly, the majordomo replied in soft tones "The company's oldest (geriatric) lawyers, and a few that were retired years before, got wind of the renovation project when the orders came in, along with the parts and workmen. They stole the display consoles to install them in their personal offices like trophies, to brag about how big and important they were. Because of the size and complexity of the new constructions, plus the renovations and tech upgrades that were spread out through the complex, I became aware of the missing parts only towards the end of the second year of work, when the technicians were ready to access the manor proper. The two large server farms and their segregated, restricted, utilities junction tunnel under the river were completed. Now they were up to raising the antennae atop the buildings and laying the wires from the tunnels through the offices and workshops that would use the neuroplexic system. It was then that I was warned by the project overseer that several consoles and other items were 'waylaid' by some of the senior-most attorneys in the WAC's litigation counsel department."

The adolescent pursed his lips angrily, demanding in a growl "Have you recovered all parts? Will the damned renos be finished at some point? And what about the bloody thieves?" The boy suddenly stopped his vitriolic explosion by quaffing the entire contents of his coffee cup, then signaling the valet to fill her up again. Stabbing violently the poor breakfast sausage with his fork, the teen
gestured with his left hand, waving the still empty porcelain cup towards the elder man to entice him to finish his story.

Nodding once, the majordomo continued "Well sir, I promptly went to the legal department offices with your project overseer, the estate's security chief and two dozen armed men in trucks, the very moment that I was apprised of the situation. We quickly recovered those pieces that were still in their hands whilst I proceeded to fire them from our employ immediately. The imbeciles tried to say that since they held 'power of attorney' for the Wise Heritage in Sault-St-Mary, they could modify your plans and revise the attribution of movables and assets according to their older, more experienced adult views, to offset your childish impulses. I didn't accept that lie, neither did the overseer nor the security chief. Then we hit a snag; several of the pieces, two holo-emitters among them, had been given out to accomplices outside of the WAC payroll. It was when we learned this that we called the local police to denounce them as running a conspiracy to defraud & steal from the company. This destroyed their lawyer-y hubris, much vaunted adultness, and exposed their clear racist hatred of your person as well."

Erasmus Chadderton took a small sip from his coffee as he prepared to relay the worst news of the batch. Having thought through the events, he realized that there was no manner of presenting this that would sound any less damaging than it actually was. On them that did the deed be the onus of the crime. "Because two of the people who received gifts were active members of the Canadian government in power, we had to take them to federal court to recover the stolen items. This obliged us to involve the RCMP along the way as it was a clear case of organized conspiracy to steal then resell the stolen property. As this is a criminal offense, we had to let the criminal court handle the recovery and impounding of the items, then the crown's attorney – obsequious quisling – immediately gave both a very low plea deal, without any prison time, for their supposed cooperation in the investigation. Now, we were in the process of having the tribunal sign the restitution orders when the planetary war exploded."

"Why was I never informed of this mess?" the adolescent asked in deceptively soft tones that were belied by the white-knuckled grip on his eating utensils. "Was there a moment at which it occurred to you that – maybe – the lawful master of the estate should be made aware his planning had been scuppered by criminals? What other orders did they ignore, or change? I want a full list, now!" the young man was fuming as he glared intensely at the older servant. It wouldn't take much now to make him explode in violence. Lucas decided to focus on eating while the food was hot to keep from saying aloud the nasty things in his mind, and also to let the older man explain without interruptions.

Taking a long breath, the majordomo steeled himself for the coming explosion that would result from what he was about to say. "We were forbidden by court order from telling you, by mail, email, telephone or even in person, about any of the matters concerned by the thefts. This came from the crown's attorney, who managed to have a judge sign off on the gag orders. The argument used was that you didn't have the necessary age, mental faculties or habits in managing large corporations to comprehend and navigate the 'subtleties' of the Canadian judicial system. When I raised with the judge the fact that you were supposed to be emancipated as of age 10 and then made 'Constable – Governor of the North-American Mid-Line', the elderly magistrate almost had a coronary on the spot. It was then that he added, of his own volition, the further prohibitions about informing you of your legal status and governmental positions unless your birth parents signed off on the messages first. No adopted parents, legal guardians or court appointed custodian could bypass his writ. From then on, I was reduced to negotiating from a position of great weakness since I couldn't fire, demote or otherwise affect the employment conditions of the criminals implicated. At that point, the active complicity of the crown's attorney with those thieves and their partners was both transparent and ineluctable."

Seeing that the only reaction of his employer was to hold out his cup for another coffee refill,
Erasmus continued the dire news. "That was when the damned judge tried to shield the external thieves, by saying that they hadn't paid for the materials, just received them as gifts between friends, so the criminal charges against them were endangered. I decided to threaten to have the recording of the entire proceedings released to the open public, and damn the consequences if I got arrested for it! His career on the Bench would be forfeit when Canadian Magistrature intervened publicly to resolve the crisis. The felonious old crud wailed and whined and threatened, but eventually relented when we held firm. However, instead of handing back the stolen parts after their recovery, he had them all impounded as 'evidence in a current case' to force us into civil court to undergo a special hearing to justify why we should recover the machines and parts before the criminal case was finished. This cleared the road for the lawyers of the betrayers to lodge in court a motion saying that if the parts are given back to us, that broke the 'chain of evidenciary custody' and would viciate the case against their clients while also showing a clear bias of the judges in favor of our side, so they wanted a mistrial declared if ever we won the civil claim. And so, faced with the choice, I decided to let the parts rot while processing the accusations against the traitors and their associates to the fullest we could, despite being handicapped by the criminal judge who was a clear accomplice and partner in the entire depraved endeavor. And that is where we are in the situation, and why it is such."

Lucas stayed silent as he sliced the rolled crepe to bite sized pieces before grabbing the maple syrup pot, using the silver sauce spoon to dispense a generous amount of amber sweetness across the next part of is meal. The teenager maintained his deathly silence as he bit and chewed through an entire piece of bacon with short, violent gestures that made his teeth clack and grind loud enough for the junior valet sitting near the serving bar to hear without effort. He drained the dregs of his orange juice, turning the glass over to set the empty vessel down on the plate that had held the toast and muffin in the beginning. As he took a slow, deep breath to calm his rage, the young male placed the empty dishes on the far side of his tray, then drawing the bowl of baked beans to eat the remains along the crepe. He gestured tartly to the valet for yet another refill of his cold empty coffee cup with his left hand, keeping his eyes down to the food as he powered through the mental miasma of anger, rage and vengefulness that blazed through his mind at the moment.

Of all the crimes that Lucas thought unforgivable, of all those acts of immorality that deserved to be called a Sin and a 'Stain on the Soul', the betrayal of trust, contracts and lawful mandates was the one that would always get him to teeter on the verge of the Abyss whence all men found Madness.

Silence reigned in the formal office until the teenager had finished all solid foodstuffs on his service tray and signaled the valet to remove the sullied wares for cleaning. The valet, now inured to the ways of his employer, did so while serving him another full cup of inky black fuel before pulling back with a full tray of dirty dishes and towels.

Sitting back in his plush chair, Lucas let the backrest take his full weight as he raised his head towards the ceiling, letting his eyes wander around the decorative wooden coffers and painted frescoes that gave the room a truly Edwardian feel. Exhaling a long weary sigh, the prodigy lowered his eyes to the majordomo, holding his gaze with his own. Erasmus Chadderton was petrified in fear at the cold, utterly inhuman detachment from emotions and social norms he witnessed in those dark flint-blue eyes.

"The eternal Master Sun Tzu wrote in his iconic Art of War: "Be extremely subtle even to the point of formlessness. Be extremely mysterious even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of the opponent's fate." And that is what my enemies amongst those geriatric lawyers and the mafious bureaucrats in Ottawa will face. I will not use such grossly crude means as the Copernicus space stations or our armored floatplane to inflict their deserved retributions. No... I have other plans for them, that can be set in motion from afar, yet function under the silent cloak of shadows."

Standing from the chair to stretch his legs, the young man grasped his cane with the right hand,
leaning lightly on it as he walked around the right side of the desk to gaze pensively at some of the private tools, books and decorative knickknacks that his ancestor kept near his person when in residence. As he browsed the shelves and glass covered cubbies, he gestured with his left hand at the elderly servant to rise and sit in the chair nearest him. Giving the relocated majordomo a lazy side-glance that still conveyed all the coldness of a predator challenged inside his lair, the pale unhealthy boy asked in soft words that belied the violence roiling inside his soul "Tell me the rest of their betrayal. Give me the over-arching details of whom in the Trudeau and Trump governments knew of this. I assume you have the master copies of the written files inside the manor? Good. I will read those later, after I come back from my little promenade in town this evening. The crude outlays will be sufficient, for now."

Erasmus Chadderton tried to keep his nerves under control as he faced the most intelligent, most technologically advanced, and most heavily armed man on the Earth, his 16 year old employer, as he gave the expanded version of events that took three long years to unfold by small, slow bits.

He didn't stop shivering in fear until he left his master's presence, when he was ordered to recover the files from the safe in the tower's basement bunker.

Unforeseen emotions

(MacGyver – 1985 opening theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 15:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 12:00pm - noon
Phoenix Foundation HQ
Los Angeles, California, USA

Mathilda Webber sat in the war room at the small desk that was part of the built-in units around the large flat screen where mission overwatch usually took place when she had the MacGyver Team in the field. Not only did she care a lot about these people, but they were also kinda high maintenance, especially the blond wunderkind with the unstoppable hands. Her mind was far away from the work on her tablet when the door behind her opened to let in the aforementioned team, as she had requested.

Turning her swivel chair around, she stayed silent, watching the byplay of the four young adults with the older man as they chose seats around the sectional couch and sofas to settle in for the briefing. Only Jack knew what this was about, but not all of it yet. Even he would have some surprises today.

"Settle down kiddies, or I'll write your name on the screen with 'see me after class' like my teachers did in grade school. And I can guarantee you it'll end up just as well, too!" she snarked at the noisy lot with a superior smirk when they all got a sudden case of silent-as-a-statue on command. Man, was it ever fun, pulling their legs like that! Best part of her job, and her day.

"Now that you are all present and awake, I can tell what we are here for. I spoke to Jack earlier today about this situation, but the last details needed to be resolved before I could bring it up in group. According to the internal monitoring of DXS personnel, the private airplane carrying James MacGyver went down between 400 – 350 kilometers south of Washington DC, inside the fragmented lunar landscape now named the 'Eastern American Wastes' by Internex Mappe Mundiae. We have no electronics on site as the nukes' EMP blast fried everything in the zone. We have tried to get an eye on the location through NSA or CIA satellites, but no dice. As it is, the small 2-prop plane
went down from a 1,000 feet elevation slow cruise into a straight dive, then nada. You are here to get
the mission brief concerning that mess."

Angus was now as pasty pale as the young scientist they had been supposed to bring back when they
flew to Vancouver. Swallowing past a lump in his throat, the young man asked in shaky tones "Are
you sending us on a rescue or a retrieval job?"

Giving the young man a look of sympathy, Matty shook her head gently as she answered. "Neither. I
already have the answers. Early this morning when I got the info, I contacted the admiral in charge of
the UEO convoy that was sent to do the post mortem on DC's remains. They sent a Chinook helo
with a full crew to the zone, then flew a straight line from north to south, using the last point of
contact with the plane as the rendez-vous coordinates. They found the wreckage in a snowy farm
field, barely 600 yards north above the last ping their transponder gave out. The helo crew recovered
two bodies, badly burned when the plane's fuel tank exploded on hard impact with the frozen
ground. The medics from the Nimitz have called me about 30 minutes ago with a summary ID from
dental & medical files that I had transferred them. The helo's team had with them one of the rare and
hugely expensive portable mini X-ray scanner that allowed to take a deep picture of James' mouth.
He had some particularly distinctive dentistry done a decade back, so I can already call the job done.
The full DNA panel will take several more days to be finally positive about the corpse's ID, but were
not expecting surprises anymore. I'm sorry beyond my capacity to express, Mac. But I don't think we
can hold on to any hope anymore. James is gone, and nothing can change that anymore."

Angus, wrapped both arms around his torso in a protective self-hug as Wilt moved from his seat next
to Leanna to go kneel besides his brother-from-another-mother to offer a shoulder to lean on. Still
wrapped in his own limbs, Angus leaned forward to bury his face in the crook of Wilt's neck, his
entire body suddenly shaking by the hard sobs that he hadn't even known were coming out. It took a
good ten minutes before the young man was calm enough to sit back in his sofa, green eyes empty,
looking to far away, lost in macabre thoughts and broken hopes. Wilt placed his hand over his
friend's heart to give him warmth and stability, nodding his thanks to Jack when the older man placed
a loving hand on top of Mac's head, carding through his long blond strands to move them out of his
face.

Leanna and Riley sat immobile until they exchanged a look then moved to sit on each side of Matty
to give her some support as well. The man who died was Mac's father, but he had been Matty's
oldest and longest friendship in her life. That loss had to be hitting her badly as well, no matter how
composed she seemed right now.

After blinking his bleary reddened eyes to reorient himself, Angus made an effort to right himself in
the seat, extending a hand to grab around blindly until Bozer held aloft the box of paper tissues in his
reach. Taking a pair, the mourning agent wiped his eyes clear, then mopped the sweat of his face and
neck, finishing with his runny nose. In a vain effort at humor, he threw the bunched-up tissue at the
trash can basketball-style, only for the projectile to plop on the rug two inches short.

"Meep! Failed! And an extra penalty for crapping up the floor, too!" Riley grumped in amusement as
she leaned low to grab then dump the trashed tissue in the can so her friends could stay seated.

Jack added "And another penalty cuz that wan'nt no regulation ball, either!" causing Angus to turn
towards him with an incredulous expression on his face. To which the older man confirmed "You
know it wan'nt right, boy. Don't try an' tell otherwise!" Jack knew his joke had borne fruit when the
blond male kept opening and closing his mouth without a sound, trying to figure out what to say to a
damned fool joke of the sort. Anything that kept Mac from overthinking his daddy's death was a win
in the old soldier's book, so he'd keep on going until the boy was back in his right mind.
Matty clapped her hands once, obtaining immediately the attention of all agents. "While it is a great sorrow that James has passed, we are facing a hecatomb of millions in the coming days. Not years, or months, or even weeks, people; just days. That's how bad the situation is. The hospitals are out of service in over 90% of cases already. Civilian police forces, firemen and paramedics are all absent from their posts to protect their families, or have died during the war's break-out phase. Practically all prisons are derelict, the guards absent or dead, their inmates on the lam or dead by infighting. The asylums and sanatoriums are in the same mess, with 100% having been abandoned by staffers. The US national guard and the standing military forces have been called by the state governors still alive & kicking, which aren't that many. The guard units are being deployed across the landmass to reestablish a semblance of order and social structure, but our analysts estimate that it's already too late to recover in anything short of a full century."

Here Matty made a disturbed face of disgust as she considered what she would speak next; there were no polite ways to say it aloud. "However, Henrietta Lange and I ran some analytics that make us expect the primary recovery period to turn bad. There are too many white supremacists and christian crusaders still hidden deeply amongst the command-level officers of the bases and ships that remain in function. It's only a question of a few days before the next bastard tries to pull a Mosley, calling himself the new Messiah of America, and then the civil war will escalate again. This will force us to undergo a mopping-up phase across all branches of armed services before we can declare them fully reliable again. The same will obligatorily be applied to police, fire, paramedics, doctors and elected officials as we regain population, buildings and land zones. Eventually, this will lead to a full scale analysis and filtration of the entire population basin to ferret out and destroy every last Nazi criminal and church whore we can find, before they can corrupt others to re-seed their poison again."

Riley made a dubious face, exclaiming "That kind of social measure sounds a whole lot like a cross between Fahrenheit 451 and 1984 with some autocracy and military tyranny thrown in for fun. Talk about dystopia much?" the young woman challenged angrily at her boss.

"Okay. I can see that were in for a rough ride. It's like when the countries in Africa collapsed decades ago," Wilt Bozer spoke up during her pause. "We all know it'll be uglier before it gets better. But how much worse can it get, anyways? The hole where DC used to sit is pretty self-explanatory, and so are the pulse beams coming down from orbit as we speak." The young black male pointed at the large screen that was showing the view near the Lake Erie where Toledo no longer sat. There was a continual barrage of blue cones compacting everything in sight to a leveled dusty plain, followed by scorching red laser beams that dug and shaped the new canals and flood troughs that would delimitate the new Toledo, when America was organized and populated enough to undertake such project anew. "You'd have to be pretty much an irrecoverable asshat to think the guy who manages those would let himself be pushed aside or intimidated into anything. The doc may still be a kid, but he wan't built the same way the rest of humanity was. How long do you think those so-called new messiahs are gonna last in front of him? He dealt with others before, he'll deal with those too."

Matty blinked slowly at Bozer, her thinking hampered as if she were drunk or stoned. It took several seconds of concentration before she responded to her agent's opinion. "Honestly Bozer, I don't know what's more bothersome; the fact you think this runaway kid has a legitimate right to use these weapons, or the fact you're banking on him cleaning our problems for free without any effort on our parts. What the fuck, man? Aren't you an agent? Aren't you an officer of the law of America?" the senior manager asked, her anger and despondency showing clearly.

Wilt snorted back his reply "Isn't the post of 'Constable – Governor' a law-keeping job too? Doesn't that make the kid a lawman just like us? Come to think of it, doesn't he have a higher job than you, nowadays? Cuz what you saying sounds like job-envy a lot more than bigotry against his age. Given he was supposed to be the guardian of the Great Lakes and the St-Lawrence River since he was ten
years old, I'd even say it was damn time he did the job. Of course, if some geriatric old cronies in DC and Ottawa hadn't screwed him outta his dues, he'd have been on the job already, and maybe the depraved bastard Trump couldn't have done what he did. It's hard to plan the country's suicide when you have a watchdog like Wolenczak sitting on your shoulder all day long."

Seeing the stormy countenance on Matty's face, Jack intervened to return the conversation towards the friendlier lands of what the new missions would be. "Okay, now! James is dead, that question’s answered. So, what next? Are we just gonna rot inside the Phoenix building or the enclave in the mountains? Because some of us can't play with gizmos all day without going nuts."

Pursing her lips alongside her mighty frown, director Webber turned her eyes from Wilt to focus on Jack and the immediate necessities of the Agency. "No, you won't be forced to stay inactive or restricted to just the building or enclave. The NCIS agents from New Orleans are going back home via the good services of the National Guard, and your team will be preparing for a prolonged mission up north, to Sault-St-Mary, at the Wise Apothecary & Chemists complex. It so happens that one of their divisions, the 'Forceful Wisdom LLP' has had contracts to manufacture weapons, vehicles, chemicals and technologies since World War I. This was forgotten because both the USA and Canada have defaulted on their obligations to the contracts. We need agents on site to reestablish our side of the equation to limit the damages. We're already looking at untold millions of dollars in damages, penalties and revenue-loss compensations, so anything that puts a cork in that particular leak will be welcome."

Angus cleared his throat, making weird noises as he tried to wrap his mind around the direction that the Agency's strategic planning was taking. "What do you mean, we're going back up north? Wasn't it enough of a clusterfuck the first time around? I really don't think the guy will be tolerant of our presence a second time. Not after everything went up in flames the way it did."

Mathilda waved away his concerns with a flapping left hand. "Nonsense! Anything that started either the Trump Christian Regency or the following civil wars weren't our making. We are victims in all this, just like he is. He may put on airs of disdain and aloofness, but I can sense that he needs, and wants, our assistance despite all the growling and teenaged angst. Our presence will give him both the legitimacy he needs to be taken seriously by the successor government of the USA, and the official channel needed to make all sides of the NAC listen to him when he speaks."

Leanna added sarcastically "And we get positioned right inside his defenses to take him out permanently if he doesn't play the game by the rules you dictate. Just like the CIA would do, if they still operated."

Director Webber turned towards her agent, nodding silently her confirmation, before saying aloud the exact opposite. "No, agent Martin, this agency does not target its allies. And we do not plan their demise or build contingencies to profit from such. Lucas Wolenczak is presently or most important, profitable, and stable, ally in the entire mess. There are no plans to see that change, and certainly no desire on my part to make it different. We depend on his presence and stability to safe-keep the northern US border with Canada, as well as most of the St-Lawrence river basin, and parts of the Lake Champlain basin too. Not to mention his industrial and medical complexes that we absolutely must keep in proper function to survive his damnable period of transition."

Leanna and Riley instantly stiffened to attention in their seats, exchanging a fearful look with their director before verbally assenting the official position that Matty had just spelled out. For a few precious minutes of mental peace, the two women had forgotten the young man's prodigious capacity to hack through the DXS servers to spy on them inside their building's most secured areas in real time. The sort of comment that Leanna had spoken could get them all killed quick, if they got back to the wrong ears. Shay Mosley's dire end was proof positive of that reality.
Taking command of the situation, Jack Dalton sighed aloud, grumping out "On the road again. In the bloody white shit, to boot! Couldn't you send us to Mexico or Spain? We need some sunlight, boss lady! All that snow can't be good for a body. Look at Riley's mom; she came back from her three years in Vancouver all sorts of weird..."

Crossing her arms over her chest, Riley exclaimed a playful "Hey! My mom ain't weirder than you are, Jack! It's an age thing, anyways." much to the others' amusement.

MacGyver snorted as he leaned to the side away from Jack, before saying "Yeah, old man! Sunstroke on the head isn't any better, especially at your age, and you're bald too..."

"I am not bald!" Jack replied offended. "I have very short hair, so nobody can grab it during a fight. That's something the Army should have taught you back in boot camp. Then again, you never did listen to your elders all that well. Or at all, in fact. No wonder you've got a rug growing on top!"

Mathilda had to whistle to get heard over the squawk of protests coming from her young blond agent, although she did get a lot of fun out of seeing him get razzed by the team on occasion. This just wasn't the time or situation for it to happen. "Alright, people! Settle down for a sec! We have a mission brief to lay out, then you can heckle each other all you want." The older woman stood to go for the Keurig brewer to make herself a much needed cup of liquid courage, thus initiating a mass movement to follow suit behind her. Good; with their hands busy and their guts warm, the team would be more open to receive their marching orders than they were at present.

Scurrying bug gets squashed

(Paris – Coffee, Donuts, & Death)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 16:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 13:00pm
In the streets
Houston, Texas, USA

Some unknown little blond turdcake was skulking slowly at the base of the 5-0's car, hoping that the burnt out wreckage would hide him enough from potential snipers and perverts that he could reach his goal without other injuries. The 12 year old shook his head in a jerky thrice to send the long flopping cowlick of hair that covered the left of his face backwards so he could see with both eyes unimpeded, for a change. The white pre-pubes really hated himself right now for having been stupid enough to miss out on his chance to use the kitchen scissors on that thing before he left his house and family behind. Running away from the dumb cunts was all well and good, but he should have prepared more than just throw a few socks, shorts, Tees, cash and cans of food in a backpack. And his favorite baseball cap had gotten knocked off during the second fight he had for his life, yesterday, explaining why his blasted hair was falling in his face, again. Maybe that Bowie knife he stole from his dad's hunting stash could be useful to chop off some?

Taking a long, patient look around the war-torn street, the kid decided that he could take a chance at peeking around. It was either that or move back to the shadows empty handed, which he'd been forced to do by gangs of thugs or brutish loners armed to the teeth. Enough was enough. He need some parts from the cop car to bolster his portable radio kit, and finding a gun or even just – anything – that was lethal would help a lot. His dad had kept his decorative steel gun cabinet tightly locked with the keys in his wallet at all times, so no dice there. His mom was also a sports hunter, but only
when dad drug her around because, otherwise, her real hunting habits tended more towards
couponing aggressively at the closest Walmart. The only weapons loose in the house when he
decided to bolt had been some of the cheaper hunting knives and some tools in their 4-car garage.
The boy had taken a pair of Bowie’s with sheaths, a multi-tool with sheath, a 12” crowbar, a large
clawed hammer, a cold chisel, small bolt cutters, a pair of Wisegrip pliers, and a small acetylene torch
that was barely bigger than his phone with spare fuel canisters.

Atop the tools, he’d swiped some things like the folding steel-sheet Forfar camping stove, 5” frying
pan, a pair of small 4” pots that could be put inside one-another, and other camping stuffs. With his
sleeping bag, that all made for a pretty heavy kit to lug around, for a small kid his age. So he’d
entered a local hardware store, emptied out from fighting and not having any employees, to filch a
two-wheeled truck like the delivery guys use. He packed the camp gear on the bottom and his
electronics on top in a separate kit, with his absolute essentials in the backpack that never left him,
even in sleep as it was his pillow.

However, lugging that dolly around was back-breaking labor, the size alone being a bother, before
even considering the weight of the stuff he kept. Still, he needed all this to live alone since there
weren’t any jobs for a kid his age, and the ATM system was down due to the planetary hack that
wrecked the banking system. Even then, he could hack or steal a credit card all he wanted but it was
useless; practically all the stores were dead, empty husks without life in them. Nobody would ask for
any payment anyways, and most places had already been looted, or worse, set on fire for no reason
but hate. He could barely find stuff to eat, let alone hoard in his kit for the road, even if he broke into
houses to raid their pantries and cellars.

And housebreaking was the best way to find living people, most of whom were armed and bunkered
inside their last safe place. The streets and shops were empty because people staid indoors at home,
not because that many were dead. The delinquent boy had learned the hard way that the population
hadn’t been reduced that much in the present, they were just hiding really well for now. And
enterprising youngsters like himself needed to be careful which lock he broke or store he stole from
cuz there could be a watcher across the street with a rifle, ready to take shots at thieves and thugs.
He’d seen four would-be thieves get shot from a distance since running away.

And even his amateur self knew that stealing from a store that had apartments above was asking for
trouble cuz that usually meant the owners lived above their shop so they’d be close by to defend
home & business alike. Again, he’d seen a few wannabe looters go down that way in the last two
days, and the lesson stuck to him, good.

Being honest with himself, the boy knew that he valued human life so little that he could easily kill or
maim somebody to eat or stay safe. Even his parents, if it came to it, since he’d stopped caring 'bout
the pair of church-dogs a while back. They cared more for their preacher’s jack-shite than for his
welfare, so he returned them the favor wholly. The only thing that kept him on a low profile was the
lack of a gun in his hands. For all he tried, despite B&E a few houses, he hadn’t found a damn piece
to hold to shoot at the pervs and thugs that were pretty much the only humans shambling around the
miserably cold streets right now.

And the automated weather stations were forecasting a fucking monsoon like back in 2017, 2018
and 2019. In fact, he could feel the temperature falling rapidly and something like wetness hung in
the air around the town, like a light mist that was too thin to perceive other than with your skin.

Fucking fucks! Couldn't this shite get any better for him?

Getting the burned cop car door opened with help from his crowbar, the kid snarled in anger as he
saw that it had been looted of weapons, electronics, and even the damned seats before getting
torched. The only thing in it was the fucktard cop's charred corpse, and that wan'nt any help at all. Taking a deep breath to quell the rage that had been his constant companion for years now, the boy flipped his hair out of his face in a thrice jerk again, yanking at it as well, the pain in his scalp calming him some.

If the fucking pigs wouldn't help him, he'd find at least a clothing store or gift shop to get a cap of sorts to hold his hair, and maybe some shades to hide his eyes from the sun's glare mirroring off the windows. If he were lucky, he could maybe find a few cellphone external batteries to charge and lug in his electronics kit to power his laptop and access his many hacks. The bloody world would not be allowed to think it got away from him, no matter what happened in the cursed 'U' bloody 'S' o' moth'ar-fuck'an 'A'!

As the boy drowned in his rage-fueled thoughts of violence, power, and glory that nobody but himself believed in, he never realized that the noise from his dragging the 2-wheel jigger had attracted exactly the kind of attention he dreaded.

The kind that had a gun in his hands, so his actual intents were immaterial. A single shot rang out, answered by a pitiful scream of agony from the blond child. The pervert had been hiding inside a small, banged-up 2007 Honda minivan on the street across from the burned cop car, using the blackened carcass as bait to catch his prey. He wanted anything solid that was tradable, edible or just could occupy his hands when he got lonely in his ugly, smelly, run-down house. As he saw it, the kid's pack was a gold mine waiting to be excavated, and the kid could be used so many ways, from labor to sex toy to food source... At worse, the criminal could just barter off the boy to some gang of thugs who'd use him up pretty much the same he would.

The 80 year old lecher let up the rear gate of the minivan, painfully unfurling his aching arthritic limbs from his prolonged crouch, and carefully climbed out of his vehicle. His unhealthy wrinkled old skin was pockmarked by disease and lack of sunlight so badly that you could barely make out that it was supposed to be white. His rumpled, unwashed clothes stained by all sorts of wastes and offal hung loosely about his gaunt frame as testament to his bad health, little food in recent days, and probably some mental issues as well. He had short fuzzy silvery hair all over his face that was uneven, unkempt and dirty like the rest of him, to compensate for the bald wrinkly scalp. He looked like a prototypical insane serial killer from a cheesy 'D' series movie from the 1980's, so it wasn't hard to understand why people had always avoided him, shunned him, and chased him away until now.

The boy certainly identified the cause of his misery easily enough, But it didn't matter. He'd gotten a 9mm pistol slug into the left calf that struck the bone hard enough to cause a fracture, but not to pass all the way through. That was why the kid had fallen to the pavement screaming in agony, all the while trying to crawl away from the geriatric monster that was slowly shuffling towards him, gun in hand.

The old man wasn't in any hurry to reach the boy. The more he crawled and twitched and screamed himself hoarse, the less energy he'd have to actively fight being bound and transported to the car. Even the injury and blood loss were all good, as they sapped that energy and rebellion right out of him.

The sick, twisted crone slowed his approach, loitering nearby, waiting for the kid to surrender to his tiredness and weakness from the leaking blood. Once the boy was tied up real well and tight, Old Man Roscoe would patch that leg up – somewhat – then give the kid a lesson in real pain and screaming. Just like his daddy used to do to him an' the neighbor's boys, in d'a woodshed, back in the 1950's. Ah, such good manly fun he'd have once again. Even if he couldn't get a hard-on for more than 25 years, beating and raping boys into submissiveness was still a thought that brought pleasure
to his ailing mind and body.

Now, if he could only remember how those damned zip ties work? And where were the car keys? He was certain he had them...

Maybe the nice looking little tyke playing on the ground could help him find them?

In between bouts of Alzheimer's, dementia, mania and psychosis, the old man managed to knock out and tie the child for his foul needs, then drag him and his kit to the back of his waiting minivan. He drove off into the beginnings of the hard rain that would sweep over Houston for five days, but nobody saw where he actually went, if he arrived at his planned destination, nor if he could even remember where it was he headed for.

The betraying, violent little wannabe hacker who had used the World Power Plant as a cybernetic honey-pot trap to extort rich men with his lies would never be seen or heard from again. Nobody would miss him, not even his family. Then again, they didn't survive the civil war either.

From on high do the Lords look down

(Sigrid – Everybody Knows)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 17:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 14:00pm
Pointe aux Pins, WAC's complex
Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, Canada

The disastrous revelations from earlier had devolved into more of the same over another hour, leaving the new master of the domain in a piss-poor mood that needed to be worked through in isolation lest he start abusing people to pass his rage. There was no way in this life that he'd allow himself to devolve to the point of copying his father or mother's lowest instincts, especially since that was exactly the sort of crass behavior he abhorred. Consequently, the boy had chosen to use the most remote and least used of all the rooms in the vast luxurious manor he owned to calm his mind without causing harm.

Lucas presently stood at the south-east panoramic windows on the 10th floor of the manor's tower keep, in the massive war room that served to oversee and manage the entire region that WAC's was supposed to command in case enemy forces came aground on the American continent. From his elevated vantage point he could see through the clear skies across the river, all the way to the tower and manorial estate that mirrored the edifice he dwelt in at present. The US version was oriented in the exact opposite of the Canadian domain, since they both used the St-Mary river's as the backside of the manors, the topography determining the minutiae of the individual buildings' shapes and positions.

The angry teenager turned away from the breathtaking vistas of the white frozen landscape to concentrate instead on the wood and metal world at hand. In the center of the vast war room stood an old fashion planning table; a scaled model of the area controlled crafted from sculpted & painted wood with metal details. Fixed buildings and several geographic features hid small colored lights that activated to indicate the alertness level or enemy presence so that everybody could follow the threats & responses as well as possible. This kind of technology was old, so much so that it predated even the simple black & white cathodic tube television systems. All the lights were triggered by individual
manual switches with each color having its own bulb & switch set, everything being controlled from the sectorial consoles built into each side of the table. As the years progressed, the masterfully crafted planning table was kept in the same method & schemes since it was an incredibly valuable heirloom from a bygone era.

However, carefully crafted add-ons were made to keep the representations up to date with landscaping and current uses for the edifices. The 1960's crew modernized the system to active electronics without compromising the aesthetics or scrapping the basic functions that would be needed in case of power & comms outages. Colored lights were replaced by high efficiency LED's and the old rheostat control boards were paired with a first generation computer to manage all signals through the existent solid wires. This computer used a punched-card reader to process input of data then reel-to-reel data tapes for solid-state archival. Even though the machine was rather small by the standards of the epoch, it was still too primitive therefore was put in storage as possible fall-back when replaced in the year 2000 by a 6th generation folding laptop device, which was also stored away when replaced in 2018 by a touchscreen tablet manufactured by Wolenbahn in San Francisco. The old hand-crafted lead figurines and vehicles used until 2018 were replaced by more detailed, realistic aluminum models with lights and working engines to make them move along the landscape as per the directions given by the computer now attached to the table. The buildings and figurines now had moving parts to show the position of gunnery turrets, artillery, drawbridges, and diverse gates that barred access to the land or edifices.

Above the table were located a brand new series of innovative conference grade holo-projectors that had been built just a few months ago, as part of Lucas' plan to upgrades to the estate's management capacities. Since those parts had been destined for a public area the felonious lawyers couldn’t abscond them without raising questions, therefore they had been delivered and installed on schedule, unlike the systems reserved for the master's private living quarters. Several high-legged swiveling bar stools with arms and short backrest surrounded the table, part of the original furnishings, as well as matching round drinks tables that normally held the coffees, file folders and telephones of the personnel in attendance. Presently the room was empty of organic life, as Lucas wanted some solitude for now. Only Luxis was floating indolently in the holocoms above the illuminated planning table, silent as he concentrated on analyzing the state of the domain’s networks and machineries to inform his brother of just how bad it had gotten.

Walking around the massive planning table to stretch his legs, while they worked painlessly, the adolescent genius skimmed his left hand over the backs of the stools and the flat surfaces of the tables, his right hand grasping loosely his dreaded cane to move in synch to his slow progression. His flint blue eyes panned across the vast open space, bearing four walls of panoramic glass panels, the view interrupted only by the elevator & staircase core with the public restroom and valet's pantry on each side. The outer walls on all sides of the tower had been cantilevered outwards by ten feet atop decorative machicolations to allow the creation of working space between the elevator shaft and the windows. This was necessary to allow men to watch over the manor itself and establish sniper positions in that angle of the edifice if needed. Instead of extending only that one side which would have given a lopsided appearance, the entire 10th and 11th floors had been enlarged symmetrically to make it look like some architectural flair rather than a defensive setup. Given that many rich estates and public buildings of that era did in fact have that sort of flaring tower in their design, nobody really asked questions.

All around the room, at the base of the windows, were thin, shallow, scaled models of the landscape that was faced from the specific viewpoint. This allowed the sectorial watchers to know if there were swamps, ponds, creeks, gullies or ravines along with the many trails, roadways, bridges, railways and buildings in their surveillance zone. These old maps had been crafted as smaller sisters of the master planning table by the same artisans, and had undergone similar upgrades by the same teams at each time that modernization had been required. Each display that Lucas looked at during his tour
was happily flashing and bleeping away at the empty air, contently doing their jobs as they were created for, regardless of the absence of humans. The one clearly jarring addition to the décor were the multiple Wolenbahn touchscreen tablets that were fixed to the masonry columns by articulated brass brackets, coupled with small but powerful digital vari-cams, also his products, hung from the apex of each ornate gothic window's stone arch.

Another obviously visible feature of the room, dated from the 1930's, were the eight small masonry & cast iron stoves that dotted the outer walls, two on each side of the chamber. These were built low to not obstruct the panoramic windows, but large enough to last 8 hours on a load of wood or coal. They sported a flat iron cooking surface big enough for two kettles and one large 1 gallon pot of stew/soup so that the watch crew would be well kept all through the days & nights of their duties.

Of course, like the office and bedrooms below, there were several decorative brass brackets holding hybrid lamps that were modernized to electrical a few decades ago. Still, the old gas and oil options were functional in each as Lucas had required them maintained, as were the candle sconce adaptors hung under each matching lamp.

Near the elevator and stairs was a massive wooden desk with a tall hutch that served as the old telephone standard. This was early 1900's tech, from back in the days when switching lines required an operator to physically take a wire and plug it into a socket on a board full of about 200 little holes, each identified only by a small number, or the rare name for the company owner, family and relatives. The old standard was kept in place since it was solidly bolted to the masonry floor, with many yards of solidly armored copper wires running all over the room and tower beneath. Amusingly enough, the system still ran the household intercom perfectly well in manual mode, even though a modern telephony box on a wheeled stand had been wired in place, in 1980, to bypass the antique. The wheeled box was then judged obsolete in 2010 when a simple steel bracket was screwed onto the wheeled base to hold a laptop CPU that now ran the phones and intercom for the entire manor, including a brand new set of Blue Tooth hubs to link wireless handsets and other devices to the home network. Walking near the console, Lucas could see the desk face with its 12 control nodes; each made of an antiquated rotary dial, a movable incoming line, and a long connection line. Set aside on the left of the desk were several dedicated out/ingoing lines for critical governmental emergencies. One line for the second half of the estate (the other war room), lines to Ottawa, Toronto (Ontario's capital) and Sault-Sainte-Marie town hall, with matching lines to Washington DC, Lansing (Michigan's capital) and Brush Point town hall, as that was the American half of the local township that was split in several sectors by the river.

Now placed next to the old telephone standard, and obsolete wheeled phone server, was a medium sized wheeled box, 12 inches on each side by 36 inches tall, connected to electricity and the manorial telephony systems. This was the new Wolenbahn server, with 128-bit / base 3-13-39 operating system and apps catalog that Lucas had ordered installed at the beginning of all the renos in 2017. At least, that part of things had been done, otherwise getting Luxis into the household devices would have been rather painful, not to mention slower than a drugged slug crawling up a hill on a patch of ice.

Across the entry of the floor's landing was the large desk & hutch reserved for the Watch Officer, or the foreman in civilian parlance, who would have been in charge of managing the sentries on each shift. Normally, the old military protocols tried to seal gaps in the wakefulness and skill levels of the men by making the supervisor switch-out at mid-shift so that good superior officers could cover more men in an attempt to spread their training and experience. It also meant that the current shift of sentries benefited from a freshly rested officer for the second part of their schedule, while said officer got fresh subordinates for the second part of his own duty, thus compensating for any loss of mental acuity or slowing down due to fatigue. Under civilian management, the system could be revived the same way to compensate for emergencies or natural disasters. The only reason the room wasn't abuzz
with a horde of men was that all the overwatch was now done electronically, through cameras and sensors, all controlled centrally from armored underground bunkers located well away from the manor's terrain in case somebody targeted the owner's family itself. As long as electricity and network capabilities were up & running, this manner of command structure could be kept, but it made Lucas happy and quite relieved that he had the foresight to insist on repairing and updating all the old tech and devices when he took over.

The war room had not been really useful for anything but solitary meditation ever since the year 2000 when electronics with color flat screens and cellular telephones became common items in every person's life. At that point, the entire estate could be managed with a system that was about as complicated to use as the good old Sim City or Civilization games. From 1980, the best that could be done was select a building or vehicle on screen to get the contact details, then manually call the local manager/driver to get the actual status and change orders if needed. From 2000 onwards, real time emails, SMS and a proprietary military management app had been the norm, mostly because both the USA and Canada wanted to put their noses in his affairs to boss his people around in full contravention of his orders or needs. Then, from 2018 onwards, his own personally created systems took over much of the day-to-day operations, when the hardware it was based on was installed properly like in San Francisco, Buffalo, New York and Boston. Nowadays, the new RF-ID badges & tags were on everybody or thing, plus full body scans required by the WAC's community health care plan, plus biometric & card swipe locks all over the estate, and enough real-time scanners to make a sci-fi starship envious, all combined to make the latest version of the management software look a lot like the MMORPG The Sims. You could now touch the screen, or speak to it, to select a person to change their individual orders. The person's specific list of contact options appeared near the icon you activated them, to select a phone, SMS, email or emergency procedures. Likewise, you could now follow that person in vivu if they were suspected of malfeasance that could lead to dismissal or police intervention.

Then you add the neuroplexic systems...

Yes, Big Brother was alive and well, and his name was Lucas Wolenczak, if you were wondering...

Completing his circuit around the cavernous chamber, Lucas sighed softly as he processed his negative emotions and boiling thoughts in proper order. He made nasty smirk as he contemplated the reddish dancing flames in the small stove that had been lit, at the windows overlooking the manor's roof line, near to the public toilet access, just fifteen feet away from the manager's desk where he now stood.

They had thought him a fool, to spend so much money and man-hours on renovations and retrofits of old relics that nobody cared for, except to sell them in antiques shops to make a quick buck off his back, as if he couldn't possibly know the value of such ornate pieces.

Snort!

Letting a full blown smile appear on his lips, Lucas thought about the many arguments he had with his accountants and the managers of several of the WAC's compounds in the last 5 years.

Being an avid amateur of vintage relics was a good thing, not a just a rich boy's folly, when it kept thousands alive, housed and fed. People were certainly starting to take his appreciation for old mechanics and electrics seriously, now that the power was out on half the grid, with most banks having gone darker than dead. Being able to use hand-cranked calculators, cash registers and punched-card processors had certainly kept all of Wise Apothecary & Chemists in good shape, as it had with Wolenbahn. New web linked devices with touchscreens, wireless connection, and 'everything' stored on the Cloud, were all good and proper, but only when the climate and society
cooperated accordingly. There was nothing like a good old civil war in the middle of winter to make a population admit that the old ways from 200 years ago aren't that old, nor obsolete, after all.

"Lucas! My report is ready, if you are." called Luxis, from his silvery cloud above the planning table.

Putting his left hand on every piece of furniture he could reach as he walked to have support if his cane or legs failed him was an old reflex by now. Even though his damaged limbs had been cooperating rather amicably all day, he wasn't deluded enough to believe it would last. Not the way that his luck was going in the last ten days or so.

"All right, brother mine, tell me what you found about this pile of dirt I inherited."

Showing the same sense of humor as the young man who programmed him, Luxis replied smartly "Well, if the taxes on this place don't kill you outright, the amount of paperwork to manage everything will bury you alive. Or serve as a funeral pyre, if we're talking about actual paper, cuz you know, with several thousand workers and their dependents in the tax forms and health plans, it kinda multiplies on its own, like hair on a human..."

The holographic boy smirked evilly as his sibling shook his head in despair. "Did I actually sound like this 3 years ago?" Lucas asked from the empty room, as if an answer would materialize from thin air.

"Nah, I toned it down on my own cuz I don't wanna give you a headache. I'm kind and caring like that." the virtual teenager came back, smirk still in place.

"I should have raised you differently." Lucas deadpanned, making a sour face as he did.

"Well, that's what you get for using a neuroplexic imprint of your own mind to create the kernel of my mind. As the saying goes: 'If you don't like the image I the mirror, change the object in front, not the glass that shows the reflection' and some such. I'm sure you get the message. You're smart that way." the blue, white & silvery adolescent pontificated sarcastically at his aggrieved sibling.

"Power switch. My realm for a power switch..." Lucas grunted nastily as he sat on one of the tall swiveling stools near the planning table, so he could see the images that Luxis would put up.

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 17:22pm

Once seated at ease, the ailing teenager grabbed both edges of his jacket to close it over his tall, gangly, shivering frame. He really needed to speak with a dietitian about taking some muscle-mass boosters to get some meat on his bones or he'd always get chills like this every time he came up north. Exhaling a deep breath that left a small trail of whitish vapor hang in the air before his face for a few seconds, the youth tried to force his mind into the proper mindset to deal with the extended, convoluted mess that was this part of the family's inheritance and history. Which begged the question as to why most of it was so badly recorded, and almost inaccessible from public archives, despite that several of the lands, buildings and vehicles seemed to be military-tasked by government contracts, and those were supposed to be public at all times.

Still, given the mess happening inside the convulsing remains of the deceased USA, the teenager could admit that the vast residential and industrial facilities (plus secret military bunkers) of the double-complex spanning 'Pointe aux Pins' in Canada and 'Brush Point' in America, south & east across the river, would be a sufficient dwelling (sarcastic irony) and forward command post, for the near future. This emplacement could last for at least the same period that he had foreseen using the
Daleminton hotel, and most logically far longer than that. The complex did have a just-built full size neuroplexic telecom hub & server farm, designed as a matched pair with both sides of the estate having hard-connected parts of the sprawling cybernetics system that made Lucas such a formidable opponent in both the virtual and material worlds.

Then there was the fact was this enormous stretch of private terrain was scary to look at.

WAC's SSM complex was composed of two asymmetrical 'squares' of 2 x 2 kilometers on each side of the river/national border. Each had enough capacity above ground, below ground, and deep in the riverbed between them, to make certain that the Sault-Sainte-Marie riverine interdiction citadel earned its name in any conflict it could be faced with. The small manned CWIS turrets defending the watercraft hangar's wet docks and private, enclosed harbor certainly weren't the only ones on the property. Those on the boundary walls were still being pulled out from their hidden storage in the underground bunkers, then hoisted by mobile telescoping cranes onto their hydraulic mounts. The turrets had all undergone a modernization retrofit in the last two years to add pulse-beam cannons, crystalline neuroplexic circuitry, and toughen the autonomous life-support against ICBN attacks. Likewise, the built-in wash-down pipeworks in the boundary walls and buildings had been flushed and tested extensively to insure it could spray either cold water, boiling hot water, or high pressure 400º Celsius steam, to fight fire, clean off chemicals or repel invaders. In several areas of the domain, louvered vents that seemed harmless were actually powerful fans to disperse combat gases to disable or kill invading forces, just like rooftop mounted sprayers could create an artificial mist of heavy oily fluids that would slowly corrode anything organic on the estate or be ignited as part of a scorched earth tactic of last resort.

Lucas could quite legally possess, store, and even use, these high powered modern weapons and many more since one of the ancient 'legacy' divisions from the Wise Heritage, 'Forceful Wisdom Inc', was incorporated as an official supplier of equipments for the police and armies of several countries, including Canada, America and most of central Europe since 1930. His great-grand-father had been somewhat of a busypbody, back in the day, and, like the ancient philosophers of the medieval era, he dabbled in many, many things. Including several that he shouldn't have, but forayed ahead anyways. Not that Lucas complained, since all those still-legal incorporations and licenses allowed him leeway in domains of law, politics, economics and society that he normally would have been pushed back from, or just kept out altogether, because of his age and views.

{ SQ } --- { Connections in low places } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 17:56pm

According to the schematics and stats showed by Luxis, the WAC's complex also benefited from a private 'infrastructures, roadway & railway' armored concrete tunnel, built by F. H. Wise in the 1940's, passing beneath the river to join the two massive segments of the complex, certainly helped with making him feel as though he had options, methods and means to act according to his own choices. It was his own private border crossing station, for which he could set the open hours, admissions terms and fees. All that certainly gave him many, many choices to work with, none of them dependent on the whims of Canadian or American elected officials. Now, the humongous transport tunnel system was an open secret since World War II ended in 1945, but nobody minded anymore since everybody in both sectors of Sault-Sainte-Marie had been told about it, and why it was there. The (cheap) permits and (very low) taxes were paid every year to both countries, plus it maintained about four thousand direct & indirect jobs on each side of the river, so nobody cared that he had a private tunnel & border crossing. Besides, with the thousands of people using his tramway and roads to reach their jobs or family every day, it wasn't like the local population would revolt against it; the critical period for societal acceptance was long passed.
What Luxis had managed to unearth in the company's records, plus the Canadian government's recently declassified military files, all showed the tunnel's conception was an amusing anecdote about an incredibly opportunistic man, with an insatiable drive to grow bigger, and more influential, in all walks of life. The original Wise Apothecary & Chemists' massive territory in the late 1800's was about a quarter of what it is now, at only 1 square kilometer on each side, without the sheltered harbors or wet-docking hangars. There had been greenhouses for medicinal herbs, transformation labs, packing plants, warehouses, a basic railway triage yard since 1891, and open piers for three canal barges side-by-side, but no actual machinery workshops. Both sides of the estate of the day were pretty similar, and they used flat bottomed cargo barges to cross the water or else were forced to use the existing train line through a lengthy detour of almost 2 days.

When Canada, pushed hard by WW-II's initial phase in 1939, decided to build a military supply station & airfield near Sault-Sainte-Marie to facilitate the transport of people and merchandise locally between allies, they built it just north of WAC in what were empty fields, unused by the small village of the day. So, seeing this, the clever Doctor Wise decided immediately to double his landholdings in the area before he was cornered against the river, going up to territories that were 1 x 2 kilometers with the wider side facing the river shore. At that time, only the legacy estate from the 1800's had walls and wet canals around it, the rest was dry open land with sparse forest cover. Once he had bought and staked his new property limits, F. H. Wise invited to his old manor in Pointe aux Pins the representatives from both neighboring countries to negotiate a proposal he had cooked up.

He offered to design, build and maintain the tunnel that would facilitate the Allies' transit of men and arms across the border for the War Time, plus allowing public emergency services to use the roadway without charges or delays, in exchange for fixed-rate permits, taxes & customs over 100 years, renegotiable at expiration in 2047. Cunningly, F. H. Wise proposed simplistic terms for all parties to make sure the politicians wouldn't balk in front of an overly complex offer. He even managed to keep exclusive usage for his companies by adding the incorporation of a private local tramway service that could be used by the entire populace, for a fee comparable to the existing bus and streetcar lines managed by the towns on either side of the river. The tramway line would pass through the center of WAC's complex, north through the new airport, then veer east to traverse the entirety of the Canadian part of S-S-M town, all the way to Bell's Point where it would need building a high elevation bridge to cross south into the USA at Palmer's Point. From that moment, the tramway rails go back south-west in a slow curve, until they reach the Saint-Mary River at the zone called Little Rapids, where a set of new high elevation bridges were needed to pass tram, trains, roadway and infrastructures across the river and several small islands. These patches of isolated wild land were bought by WAC for greenhouses with worker dwellings, separately from the main complex, but linked integrally to the supply chain via the new road & rail system. From that riverine crossing, the tramway line traversed the entirety of the American side of SSM, until it reaches the southern segment of WAC's walled complex to close the rail loop.

The system having been designed primarily for military transportation in time of conflict, the rails were built doubled on each direction with 25' high clearance, as were the roads and all aqueduct, sewage, electricity, telephony and commercial petroleum or high-steam pipelines. In the early 1960's were added dedicated television and computer network cables to help management run the business and secure the terrain. It was also at that time that the Canadian government decided to officialize the transformation of the Sault-Sainte-Marie airport into a civilian facility while transferring it to the local authorities. That event encouraged WAC's to proceed with a rapid third expansion of its territory to achieve two blocks of 2 x 2 kilometers, immediately putting in place the defensive wet moats, outer perimeter walls with guard towers, enclosed commercial harbors, and the dedicated machinery workshops for trains, trucks, boats and floatplanes. The depths of the Cold War was the Golden Age of the WAC industrial & habitation complex in Sault-Sainte-Marie, whilst elsewhere the company holdings were shuttered or barely surviving, like the Wise Heritage & Trust manor in Buffalo.
After Luxis closed the presentation windows, he let Lucas to his ruminations, preferring to go for a
swim across the property's network while his flesh brother brooded. The organic adolescent was
rather poor company when he was in such a mood, but also quite sedentary, so the virtual boy had
no problems with leaving him alone for some time. Besides, if the eldest needed help, he had enough
electronics on him that Luxis would hear it and intervene as necessary.

The Deeks option

(NCIS LA – opening theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 18:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 15:00pm
OSP – Spanish House
Los Angeles, California, USA

Hetty Lange sat in her office, on the main floor of the Spanish House, right in the rear-left corner that
she had staked out for herself so many years ago. She was temporarily overshadowed by the glassed
enclosure that had been Shay Lynn Mosley’s office during her brief tenure in LA. Now that both the
US DOD and Mosley herself were dead and buried, she could breathe at ease again, not feeling
spied upon by her own people anymore. The shoddily built office cube would be disassembled in the
coming weeks, until the mezzanine was back to its original shape, thus leaving the second story
completely open above Hetty’s head, to let in the natural light from the small windows set just under
the ceiling, around the perimeter of the square common area that was the heart of the building.

Placing two fingers on her right temple, Hetty gently rubbed her aching head, trying to endure the
noises of demolition coming from the main roof. Given just how exposed to attack the Spanish
House was, she had relented to the opinions of her subordinates and mandated a renovation plan that
included raising two complete new floors above the central quad, with a new flat roof. This was to
create two levels of living quarters for the permanent crew that would staff the OPS room, armory
and infirmary as well as permanent armored sniper nests at the four corners of the new roof. The flat
surface would also be ideal for setting solar panels linked to water hoses to create a supply of
naturally heated fluid for washing and laundry, and some electricity to fill batteries. As a last
recourse, it could serve as a rallying point to get picked up by a helicopter with rope ladders or an
underslung nacelle.

The elder woman was dragged from her deep mulling of long-term strategic planning only to be
dropped into a different type of planning that was just as important, and covered a similar length of
duration as the constructions did.

Martin Deeks had returned from the enclave clean-up.

Clearly, the entire team around him was exhausted in a manner that expressed publicly that it was
mental fatigue, rather than physical tiredness, that aggrieved them. Then again, clearing out a
building full of decomposing cadavers of people who had been your colleagues barely two days
before was bound to be harrowing. When you take into account that several of these defecting agents
had brought in their families or dependents to find safety behind Mosley's walls and organizational
skills, well, seeing scores of dead civilians, especially children, was never easy for anybody. The
only good news was that there hadn't been any explosions reported, all the team was present, and
they didn't seem in a hurry to make their report therefore the situation was probably well in hand.
Standing from her chair, Hetty made her way to the emplacement where the four senior teammates had their desks set in face-to-face pairs. Walking slowly to let the agents take off their equipment and settle down into their desk chairs, the older manager keenly observed all the minute details that indicated just how much fatigue, weariness and anxiety each officer strained with.

It wasn't good.

While Callen, Kolchek and Blye gave a surface impression of being balanced and operating normally, the telltale signs were saying the opposite. These two needed some sort of vacation or some lighter duties in the coming days or they would break under the emotional burden.

Mister Hanna was in a bad way. Ever since his wife Michelle died at the hands of terrorists last year, he'd had a bad time with alcohol, isolation, loneliness and depression-induced mood swings. He was closer to the edge than Grisha or Kensi, so he needed a vacation NOW or NCIS would lose him in the coming months, probably before March 2021 ended.

The worse off was detective Deeks; for half a year already he had been giving signs that he was no longer at ease in this job, nor this life. The plans to get married with Kensi Blye kept being scaled back in scope due to financial concerns that limited even the short hoeymoon they wanted, and needed, to take to savor the event. Then, the ceaseless 'emergencies' in the course of their jobs kept pushing back the wedding date, and they were just lucky that their international travels had been kept on this side of short & curt (not sweet, no...) in the last 6 months. If any other type of Vietnam or Mexico style situations occurred, Hetty might lose Deeks right before the mission send-off because he could very well chose change affectations, or leave the job altogether, right there in the pre-op briefing. As it was, she wasn't even certain she could keep him past the turn of the New Year, let alone to the end of January 2021. Every signal he sent were those of a man running on fumes, no longer having any energy or mental endurance left to give.

Sighing in sadness at the necessities of her job, and what the civil wars had turned the NCIS duties into, Hetty joined her hands in front of her abdomen, trying to given the impression of a wealthy woman out for a stroll around her garden. This presentation usually set her team at ease, telling them that if the boss was relaxed then everything was safe and they could relax as well. So much for that pipe dream.

{ SQ } --- { One less mess to clean } --- { SQ }

Upon seeing their manager coming towards their work cluster, Sam, Grisha and Anna sat straighter, turning all attention to the newcomer but showing no signs of anxiety besides the micro-expressions only a pro could detect. Kensi stood up, putting her hand on Marty's shoulder to lend him some emotional support just as much as to get some reassurance from his presence. The small smile she gave Hetty looked as fake as it felt, telling the older female that her senior agent had problems that had been developing silently too. Marty didn't even try to stand, instead leaning backwards into the chair enough to make the whole thing tilt rearwards on its pivot mechanism. Closing his eyes as he passed a shaky hand over his face, the young man sighed aloud in bone-deep tiredness.

Trying, and failing miserably, to give his boss a friendly smile that came out as a crooked rictus, the ex-LAPD detective said aloud "Whelp... It's that time of year again, when I get to defend my job performance to stick around for another season or two. On the flip side, this one oughta be short, cuz, y'all know, there ain't a big recruiting pool out there anymore."

Letting her face reflect her real emotions for one rare occasion, Henrietta Lange shook her head negatively, replying "Of course not, Mister Deeks. You were never kept in our august assemblage due to lack of recruits, but rather because the LAPD were cruelly undeserving of the privilege of your presence and services. A young man of multiple talents, genial personality, and broad
perspectives such as yourself, was completely wasted on those dregs of the law enforcement community. The proof being, of course, in the fact that 77% bugged out in the very first day of the civil wars being triggered, with the 33% balance getting killed off too fast to have time to make the decision themselves. You are one of the few rare, precious, exceptions to the fall of the LAPD, detective Deeks, and I am greatly thankful for your continued participation and efforts on the behalf of NCIS, and our nation. Even though, I have to admit, the latter isn't in any shape to be grateful to anybody for anything at present. It's the thought that counts, as the saying goes."

Callen sat back in his chair, looking anxiously between Hetty, Deeks and Kensi, finally exhaling a soft curse in russian, whispering to himself "Damn! We're in deep shit if she's pulling out the 'grateful nation' spiel to keep him with us."

Hanna folded his arms over his chest, making him look like a miniature – and slightly eroded – mountain of shining obsidian that exuded discontent and disapproval at all comers. Puffing out an exhale of despondency, the black male griped "It's not like we weren't all aware Deeks was straining under a lot of stress and problems for the last year. We all were, but he had LAPD and detective Whiting riding him on top of everything else NCIS dealt with. Honestly, folks, weren't you all seeing it coming since July? I'm not happy he wants to leave, not any more than any of you, and especially not in this mess, but I ain't surprised like he'd done it behind our backs. He was always open about his feelings on the matters with the whole team, not just with Kensi."

Kolchek spoke softly, chiming in support for the person and the team at large. "I understand that you have been under duress lately. I certainly haven't been involved with you long enough to have lived or felt these strains the same way. But, I know that it is important for your health, and the team's capacity to function safely, that you stay in the field only if you have the health, mind and energy to do it. Otherwise, you could accidentally endanger someone due to poor reflexes or lack of emotional implication in the situation you're processing. Besides, as Hetty said, you have multiple talents and a wide perspective on events. I'm certain she has a dozen things that need done that could allow you a change of pace without actually leaving us completely. Field work isn't the only thing needed."

"Speaking of field work," Hetty asked, taking the chance to change the subject while it passed in front of her, "Why are you back so soon? I had expected the clearing of the enclave to take several days."

Sam grunted in contempt, replying "It would have, if we'd been dealing with incompetent people bent on letting us hang in the wind. Mosley had built herself one sweet powder keg to sit on, I can tell you that much. Several dozen barrels of premixed ANFO with the detonators and wireless hubs all placed and rearing to blast."

Director Lange massaged her left temple as the picture began to form in her mind. "wireless hubs to link the bombs and detonation controller?" she asked glibly, just to confirm her suspicion.

Callen simply nodded as he puttered with stuff on his desk, Kensi looked at her fiancé who seemed preoccupied by the screensaver on his computer's monitor, while Anna shrugged powerlessly.

"Yeppp," Sam declared, popping his 'P' like a snarky teenager. "I think you can guess how well that ended up doing in the context."

The female spymistress pursed her lips in dire contemplation, slowly elocuting "I gather then that we owe doctor Wolenczak's goodwill yet another debt. No doubt his hacking skills resolved that particular mess without setting anything ablaze. We wouldn't have the enclave, let alone the buildings, machinery and food reserves without his timely assistance. I shall mention that to him in our next vid-con."
"Yeah... You do that." Kensi mumbled in a dark mood. "In the meanwhile, we'll all be contemplating the stupidity of creating defense or self-destruct systems based on wireless signals when a grand-master hacker is our declared ally (potential enemy), and just how NOT secured our buildings are since then."

Sam detailed the situation; "Wolenczak found the signals, hacked in, traced them from the stand-alone server in Mosley's office to each of the wireless hubs around the enclave, then caused each hub to go into a locked loop as if it were being tested by the factory techs before packaging & shipping. When we reached the terrain to start securing the premises, we received on all our phones a map of the buildings with the locations of all the bombs, hubs and secret internal espionage servers that Mosley intended to use to peep on her own folks to keep them in line. We only needed to send one person per cluster of barrels to physically remove the blasting caps and wires, reset the hubs, and the job was done."

Anna chimed in glumly "We were basically doing the young man's errands, more than anything else."

"Oh, bugger it all!" was all Hetty could answer to the situation before her eyes.

{ SQ } --- { A heart in turmoil } --- { SQ } ---

Given that the problem was actually fully solved, even if not by a method she could control, Hetty was now satisfied that the enclave could undergo the cleaning and sanitation necessary for human habitation, which would then lead to their men and families having a safe haven at last. Given that the resolution was accomplished and final, she rerouted her mind to the next problem at hand.

"Detective Deeks, we were due for a conversation, following this morning's briefing. I do believe that, in the light of the current mission being finished, now would be the appropriate time."

Marty gave his entire body a shake, making him look like a shaggy blond dog shaking off after a long nap by the fireplace. Squeezing Kensi's hand for mutual support, he stood up to walk with Hetty so they could find an enclosed place for a private chat. After the fucking mess of a charnel house they had just cleared out, a coffee with brandy would be good, and maybe a sandwich too. He said so as he shoved his hands deep in the pockets of the dark blue cargo pants he wore, walking slowly so as to let Hetty's shorter stride keep up with him.

The last thing the team heard was Hetty's comment about a Napoleon VSOP 10 years, a bit cheap yes, that she'd been hoarding as coffee aromat, for the rare rainy days Los Angeles got. The oddly matched pair were seen disappearing through the doorway that led towards the washrooms, service stairs, and the small staff cafeteria that almost nobody liked using because it was so small, cramped, and had almost no choices. Vending machine pre-wrapped 'stuff' was never truly tasty so people preferred packing their meals, ordering something for delivery, or going out to nearby restaurants. Most probably the two colleagues would just grab a coffee then move on elsewhere to be alone for their chat.

Hetty led Marty to the building's poorly equipped cafeteria for whatever solid food and coffee were available since his team had skipped lunch in order to finish processing the enclave faster. All 8 critical buildings had been cleared out much, much faster than Hetty's experience suggested they would need. She had anticipated a work rate of one edifice per half-day in the best circumstances, not 5 hours for everything, not that anybody complained for the quickie job being finished. It meant their men were going to be safely housed that much sooner. After grabbing the much needed meal and liquid courage, both agents used the narrow service staircase to climb down to the second basement where the armory was located. Walking passed the weapons workshop, they marched down a corridor that linked with the second level of underground parking, entering a room that was
labeled as a janitor's closet but was in fact the entryway to a hidden security surveillance room. One more of Hetty's little secrets that riddled the walls of any building she used.

Once well ensconced in thickly padded swivel chairs, surrounded by monitors, sensor readouts and flatscreen TV's that showed eight different international news channels at the same time, the pair could finally unload some stress, and give Marty the time to eat before talking. After Marty had eaten his two plain tuna salad sanwiches and drank half his coffee, adulterated with Hetty's secret booze stash, they were sated enough to dig into the problem that overshadowed everything.

{ SQ } --- { High hopes deceived } --- { SQ }

Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 15:30pm

"You have been thinking of leaving not only the LAPD, but NCIS as well." Henrietta began in a tone of hesitation that was rarely heard from her. "Unless I sorely miss the mark, Mister Deeks, it may even be that you have been thinking of leaving all policing completely. Could you enlighten me?" she asked gently, genuinely afraid she would lose one of her best and most versatile agents.

"It isn't an easy thing to explain, the sort of emotions churning in my gut right now," Marty replied slowly as he was deep in thought, "but the concepts are simple enough to catch."

Letting out a soul-weary sigh, the blond-haired male fiddled with his styrofoam coffee cup as he tried to explain the mess inside his heart. "I can't do it anymore. I started out as a lawyer because I wanted to be part of the Public Defender's office for real; that was actually my career goal. To be the defender of the small, poor and sick who can't afford a representative but should get a good, decent one nonetheless. Boy, was that youthful idealism or what!"

His blue eyes displaying a soul-deep weariness, Marty snorted in contempt at the thoughts boiling inside of himself. "I didn't even spend a handful of years in the PD's office that I switched over to the police academy, getting trained as a detective then joining the LAPD. At that point, I had become convinced that the best remedy for the broken court system was to make certain that as few people as possible ever entered the damned thing. Because I sure saw what happens to those, even rich and powerful, who got sucked into that bottomless pit of despair called 'Department of Justice'."

Closing his eyes, the agent leaned back in his chair until his face was towards the ceiling as he continued the harrowing lifestory. "So then I tried to be the kind of cop that was honest, didn't abuse his badge, and never sent people to court or jail unless they earned it, because nobody deserved to be put in that unholy meat grinder we call 'The System'. Well, it turns out that the LAPD wasn't in the market for honest men, and putting people behind bars really is the only thing the cops, DA's and judges have to do to make it look functional. The population doesn't care, the politos don't care, so neither do the court servants. The LAPD brass quickly got fed up with my honesty, so they began sending me to undercover stings, ever more dangerous at each new mission, in the clear hopes I would either quit from fright or die at the hands of criminals when I was discovered as a cop. Then NCIS came along with a request for a 'Liaison Officer' and I thought I'd hit the jackpot at last, especially since I was the only volunteer."

Marty shook his head sideways, expressing just how wrong that foolish idea had been, and how the results didn't match the hopes he had kept alive for years.

"I wanted to help people. I wanted to lend a hand to those who were passed over, ignored, or willingly set aside in the ditch to clear the way for those in Power. Becoming an officer of the court was never about money, prestige and authority. Becoming a cop was never about being able to pummel brutes to submission, or shoot anybody that annoyed me that day. Maiming or killing people with assault rifles, grenade launchers, chemicals, or ramming them into a cruddy red paste on the
pavement with a vehicle were never my desire. How the fuck did I pass from being a 'helper' to being a 'hurter' who sets the city ablaze everytime he leaves his house?"

Henrietta sighed despondently, her own weariness showing on her entire person for a rare occasion as she tried to articulate an answer that the devoted agent could accept. The problem was saying something that was honest, not bullshit or banal platitudes he'd told himself already.

"Mister Deeks, I can't for the life of me come up with an answer to that. I can only apologize for having dragged you into a situation that was far different than what I had promised when you began collaborating with our agency. It had never been my plan to change your assigned task as formal point of contact & legal advisor into a SWAT team inter-arms specialist. All those years ago when you joined our ranks, I had never foreseen that the criminal elements would become so violent, so depraved, and so completely disconnected from human norms, that rabid curs would be easier to negotiate with than what we have dealt with on a daily basis over the last 5 years. As for the circumstance that surrounds us, namely the US Civil Wars of 2020-21, I can only plead helplessness as none of us could predict just how badly things would degenerate."

Marty kept his eyes closed, trying to stave off a stress migraine as he gave his boss a snarky smirk of disbelief, not willing to let her words pass unchallenged anymore. "Yeah, about that... I don't actually believe that, that nobody saw it coming, or guessed how bad it would get. How many agencies had 'Noah' contingencies prepared? How many military contractors or 'Friends of Power' got help to prepare? The house I bought in joined account with Kensi didn't pay for itself, and we certainly couldn't afford the basement bunkers or the surveillance tech. Mosley didn't prepare that enclave by the cargo docks just on a lark. Our good buddies over at the DXS didn't prepare their enclave in the city's eastern mid-height mountains simply to get away from the trafic jams. And the Wise/Wolenczak family didn't build those massive multi-mile terrains with moats, walls, towers and gunnery nests out of nostalgia for the feudal society of the 1600's or English baronnial architecture. People saw it coming, Hetty! But they didn't stop it because they thought they could get richer, more influent, obtain more raw Power, than if a state of peace and stability was maintained. And now we poor chmucks have to clean it up, or at least endure long enough that the bastards have had their fill of war profiteering, so they finally permit us to end this to set the country to rights."

Director Lange pursed her lips in disaccord, but took the time to think before replying. The younger agent's arguments had clear validity, especially in the face of the 'Noah' protocols that were applied with a lot of differing efforts, and wildly varying results. The arguments about the Wise complexes was in a class of its own, since they had been building those industrial edifices for two centuries in America, and more in Europe. But to Deeks it was all the same: people had foreseen the wars coming, and since the 2000's close to 50% of the USA's population had been expecting, sometimes awaiting eagerly, a 'Great Holy War' to cleanse the country of the impure and infidels. Once that fight starts, the nitty-gritty details of who prepared what, why, or when, no longer matters anymore, only that they knew but never warned anybody, and were now raking in the profits just like everybody else.

"Ah, bugger it all!" Hetty griped softly. "No matter what I say, the simple truth is that you have eyes and a functional mind; you can arrive at the conclusion yourself. There have been entities preparing for war throughout all epochs of humanity, sometimes for profit when they can influence the outcome of the war, or purely defensively when they have no choices. In the middle ages, people living around the rivers of Europe fortified their towns because they knew the Vikings were coming, and would return the next spring, and so on as long as the town wasn't sacked and burned. Nowdays, we build bunkers out of poured concrete or pre-welded steel casings but for exactly the same reasons; a declared, publicly acknowledged enemy is coming on the horizon. The only variable nobody controls is how long it takes the enemy to reach our lands, and then our walls, but come they do, their troops are always on the march and never stop for more than a short pause. What you see is
simply the inescapable outcome of this cyclic, self-perpetuating planetary mechanism of which we are the moving parts, the fuel, the program and the user, etc... And just like a miserable fool who not only drives while drunk and stoned out, but also has a cigarette in the mouth and a pair of cellphones all at once. Just like that fool, humanity is driving impaired and distracted, and without a care in the world for the result to itself."

Marty raised his head to glare at Hetty straight on, agreeing with her evaluation but not in the mood to let her philosophize her way out this mess. She'd sweet-talk the white stripe off a skunk's back, if given half a chance, and the man knew that he had to make a stand now or he would die in the field, still unmarried, and, maybe not even engaged anymore either.

Clearing his throat noisily, the agent replied "It's not that you're wrong on the overall concepts about humanity's warmongering, or the causalties of the present epoch's conflicts, it's that I'm at a point where I'm passed caring for it all. I'm at a point where, for my mental health, for my sanity and my very sense of identity as who 'Marty Deeks' is in this life, I have to change tasks or jobs, but it has to happen or else something inside of me won't reach the finish line with the rest of me. Unless you absolutely want me to be reduced to a soulless husk that shuffles from one mission to another without any life, thought or care, we'll have to come up with something. Quickly. Like, in the coming weeks, if not days, quickly."

Henrietta took her glasses off, dumping them unceremoniously on the security monitors' desk top then passed both hands over her face, trying to rub away the moral and mental fatigue that were haunting her more and more with every day that passed. Taking a deep breath, she sipped some of her own adulterated coffee, wincing in distaste at the lukewarm beverage but swallowing more anyways so as to get the kick in the motor from the brandy dissolved in the dark depths. After a few minutes of silent contemplation, Hetty exhaled a belly-deep sigh, coming to the conclusion that she had tried to avoid because that same gut had been giving her weird feelings about it.

"I have options for you, mister Deeks, but none that I raise with you easily, nor happily, as it gives me pause and many qualms. The persons involved are not in any ways as friendly as we are made to believe, but this could be the best of all worlds, given the fact that we are drowning in a shitstorm located above an open-air cesspit. This is gonna stain everyone, we only get to choose which offal splashes us, not if or when. Do you understand the gravity of what I have held back?"

Seeing Deeks nod silently to her question, the veteran spymistress pursed her lips in distaste, making a face as if she were truly mired in a cesspit, as she described. Putting her glasses back on, she pointed at the younger agent's chest, warning him; "My options for your case aren't any prettier than the position you have presently. At first, it could seem pleasant, or at least safe due to the sedentary nature of the tasks. But that sedentarity would only be short-lived, and come to an end all too soon for all of us to be happy with it. And you could still be led into fights, or at least interrogations of enemy assets, no matter which choice you pick. We are living multiple civil wars in the USA homeland, and most countries on Earth have destabilized catastrophically, or they will in a matter of hours, by now."

"What are those options?" Marty asked timidly, almost afraid to know.

Raising three fingers on her right hand, Hetty detailed "I have three options that are readily available for an agent with your talents, experience, and the certified formation to do them well. In fact, it's because of your Law Degree and municipal policing training that you can be considered for them, otherwise, we would be having to set you as the cafeteria attendant or a janitor in the new enclave."

With a face of mixed annoyance and dread, the blond policeman made a 'gimme' gesture with his left
hand, just as he gulped the rest of his cold coffee. "Okay, O'le Gal, lay it on me!"

"You asked for it, Mister Deeks." Hetty snarked back, not angry since he was in fact getting a bit more lively than before. "The first option is that I keep you in Los Angeles as our Liaison to DXS so you can guide our inter-agency paperwork, personnel exchanges, inventory swipes, etc... You would work directly under my hand, always in the same building, and would only travel to the DXS base or enclave inside the LA perimeter, never further."

"The second option is that you become our Liaison to the UEO Police & Security forces. Now, I remind you that I am currently the 'Acting Director' of NCIS for the entire USA, not just my sector anymore, and it's only because everywhere else has gone dark that I'm not swamped in papers, and crew transfers to fill vacant posts, or running after stolen inventory. As I cover the country, including our out-of-border activities, and the UEO is inter-confederative, this job means a lot of long range, international traveling, although you would be posted mostly here in LA or at our office in Florida. The worst threat to your well-being should be in the form of impaired diplomats, pushy politos and some big-wig ship commanders trying to influence the outcome of NCIS investigations and processes. And those problems are only for as long as we can maintain a semblance of national management reliably enough to emulate our usual sovereignty. If the country completely collapses... Well, the DXS liaison would keep you in town, whereas the UEO liaison would put you near ground zero of our implosion."

"The third option is bitter-sweet because it fits your needs the best, but carries the worst risks in terms of seeing you in fights or direct contact with enemy assets. Also, the principal 'friendly' could hardly be considered as such, despite that he is temporarily my 'superior', as you so intelligently surmised this morning at our briefing. The 'Constable – Governor' of the North-American Mid-Line has requested that we establish a legal-attaché posting in our directorate's structure to interface with his queries, and orders, more efficiently and without the inevitable balls-giggling that occurs when adult males over 50 years old interact with him, be it in person or writing. I have been told that he expects this person to come at the WAC’s compound to initiate the processes for two or three weeks, then they would only need to go back in person yearly, for 7 to 10 days to close the fiscal & legal year each December. Like the other positions, this is upper management, directly under my own position, and would be relatively safe as long as you are in Los Angeles, since I would keep you out of the field unless the HQ building itself, our our enclave, is attacked. If you get a call for mandatory travel to assist Lucas Wolenczak in person, I cannot give any guarantee of what he would ask, as the written job description we received by email is rather wide and blurry; just like the job you have presently. In fact, I have the nasty feeling that doctor Wolenczak may have taken your field work and results as the template to write the job rules and expectations, rather than the limitative writ the LAPD had given at the beginning of your tenure."

"Well crap." Deeks choked out, "You weren't kidding about bad options and worse. And those are the only ones you have?" he asked, practically begging her to have kept something in her back pocket as a tactic to make him agree to it right away, instead of haggling for salary and benefits.

"If you want to have an employment in our agency at a level of pay, security clearance, information access, regular meetings with the senior field team, and a good usage of your full spectrum of skills, then yes, I'm afraid these are what I have that isn't just as another field team position. The closest next job would place you as either managing officer, or shift foreman, for our enclave's new defensive militia that I am planning to recruit from civilian volunteers. We will be selecting amongst the families that are pooling inside with the agents who have survived, and answered the call to come serve. That means training them through an abbreviated boot-camp for an immediate start-up, then at least one or two days of training per week, all year long, until they have the equivalent of full-cadet status, which is the best we can ask of wall-walkers whose only jobs are to scope out the territory from on high, talk into a phone or intercom, and occasionally shoot their AR-15 rifles if the
compounds are besieged."

Marty leaned forward to put his elbows on his knees, his face craddled in his hands as he moaned aloud a pitiful "I'm fucked not just a little, aren't I?"

Hetty snorted in good humor at his dramatics, snarking back at him "At least we're in it togeth. Think of how much worse it would be if you were alone. Not everybody would be so accommodating as to assist you during this crucial change in your life."

Raising his face to look at the older woman incredulously, Marty stayed silent because he had a gut feeling that any answer he spoke would make things a whole lot worse.

Owning a rather sizable problem

( - )

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 18:41pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 15:41pm
Pointe aux Pins, WAC's complex
Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, Canada

Lucas, was now thinking rather darkly about his stupid ancestor, and his equally stupid, asinine attempts at 'worthiness tests' to determine his 'true heir'. Who the bloody fucks did that sort of thing, anyways? He might as well have left the damned company to his blasted cat! At least the jobs would have been saved from closing down by sheer neglect and disinterest. Unless it was the lawyers who invented this, as a way to block anybody from taking ownership. That corruption amongst the lawyers and elected people in both countries could explain a lot.

Rubbing his forehead in depressive anger, the teenager wondered anew just how deeply embedded in the family's genetics 'congenital idiocy' was. Both his parents certainly had it, just like the grandmothers had, and they took theirs from Wise directly. After losing a minute or two to his morose thoughts about just how much he owned, and how close to all disappearing it had been just a few years back, the boy shook himself awake, tapped his cane on the hard cement floor twice, then set to marching out of the watch room. He needed to walk, to move, to make his mind percolate all the raw data and factoids he'd just found out.

Taking the stairs, he slowly climbed down to the bedroom level to get his winter clothing. From his bedroom he called the central valet guard station, to ask for one of the on-shift people to serve as guide. As he took the elevator towards the third floor where the connection with the manor was, the cabin stopped at the kitchen level to pick up Raphael Chadderton who had decided to be his new employer's tour agent for the evening. The young adult had anticipated that Lucas would want to visit the property over the coming days so the butler had cleared some of his scheduled tasks, delegating to the junior valets and maids so he could attend the Master himself, now that he was finally present.

Lucas wanted to start with a walk around the perimeter of the manor itself, to visually see the size and shape of the structure that was now his main base of operations for the coming months. He needed to feed his prodigious eidetic memory with the unfiltered images & feelings that came with the real-life terrain, buildings and people, not dry-cut data sheets anymore. So, the pair walked out from the main entry, giving the younger teen a good chance to see in detail the masonry, steel and
glass that composed the reinforced portal, as well as the layered defenses surrounding it. Afterwards, they decided to walk clockwise around the plot of land reserved for the family, as that alone would equate a 4 kilometer walk for the evening. Lucas chose to walk close to the perimeter wall, to inspect the protective curtain’s gate-keeps and towers, especially the newly refurbished weapons turrets, and also to have some perspective on the incredibly tall and massive mansion structure. The 11 storeys of the flaring tower overlooked everything on the compound, since few things but industrial chimneys reached so high in the air anywhere in the WAC’s complex.

Answering kindly the short salutes, and polite platitudes, given to them by the few foremen or managers who recognized them as they walked amongst the tall brick and concrete buildings of his heritage, the rich teenager took his own sweet time to tour the facility that he had only once before in his life visited. It had been a whirlwind of a tour, at age 10, when he was taking over the Wise legacy. That visit had been so curtailed that it allowed him only one day to skim over the accounting books and managerial plans before getting back on the floatplane to go visit another facility that had been in dire difficulty. In fact, other than Buffalo, New York City and Boston, Lucas had not really spent any considerable time inside any of the other manors or industrial complexes owned by his ancestors. It was a crying shame, too; these people had known how to plan, design and build stuff in a way that really merited the appellation 'Old Glory', and they deserved to be preserved in functioning state so the people had jobs and lives.

The pair of young men stopped at the rear of the private grounds, near the artificial harbor, so that Lucas could see the size and openness of the waterway, including the watergate in the external wall that separated the private terrain from the river. The sheer size of the watergate at 250 feet wide, flanked by weaponized guard towers, was designed to block access to large boats and low-flying aircraft alike, with the gunnery turrets insuring the besieging enemy would be held back forcibly. Similar guard towers ringed the shores and docks of the enclosed private harbor, guaranteeing that any assault would not crush the defenders if they managed to bulldoze through the outer walls, but instead the home force would have a second chance at repelling the charge.

Lucas sighed in heartfelt relief as his weary soul shed its burdens at the sight of dozens of workers still moving around like busy bees in a lively hive despite the late hour. The adolescent left the hangar, walking over the steel drawbridge and deep wet moat that surrounded the huge edifice, treading carefully on the snow covered cobblestones. Assisting his march with his armament cane, he slowly ambled through the 'public' working areas of the older, separately walled 'legacy' area that enclosed the enormous manor and its dependencies. This was the original beating heart of the Wise Family’s economic might and technological prowess, given a new lease on life and usefulness. Feeling peaceful at long last, the young man enjoyed the feel of the open skies around him, and the clean river air rushing through his long blond hair. He extended a bare hand, letting some of the white powdery snow that was beginning to fall again settle in his palm, getting tickled by the chilled wetness of the stuff.

Taking a deep calming breath, he adjusted his wide brimmed hat and gloves, deciding to take his time walking around before retreating inside the thick walls of his heritage for the night. Thick walls that his ancestors, victims of centuries of wars, Inquisition and pogroms in Europe, had known they needed to build to stay alive. Along with underground bunkers, attic shelters, secret rooms, hidden passages, with many infrastructure backups and redundancies layered side-by-side to make certain the buildings were always defended and livable, regardless of weather or warfare. If the governments of Canada and America had bothered to look beyond the large amounts of monies paid in licenses, permits, taxes and border excise duties every year, they would have realized by now what kind of heavily armed, deeply entrenched toxic parasite they had been fostering in their lands.

"Snort! Self-blinding is such a 'beautiful' psychological mechanism. No wonder every tyrant, mafiosi or cult guru who ever existed exploited it so fully." Lucas whispered nastily under his breath, as he
slowly walked around this magnificent property to his own rhythm for the first time in five years.

As they circled back around towards the front of the manorial enclosure, the young owner could only gaze in wonder at how truly majestic it was, even though there had been many phases of updates for technology and land uses. Doctor Wise had always insisted on maintaining the original aesthetics of the basal design, so all the new constructions had been built the same way; a structure of thick steel ‘I' beams with re-bar and concrete clad in brown brickwork. All the window frames, door frames, balcony floors and banisters were all steel structure covered in molded concrete, often painted to look like wrought iron or wood from afar, to make people believe the buildings weren't as armored as they were. The roofs were similarly crafted; thick steel beams and girders with re-bar, molded concrete and a decorative covering of flat steel sheets electroplated with copper to make believe that it was a traditional 'ordinary' wood timber frame & copper sheet roof like other great houses of the era.

His ancestor had been a paranoid bastard and a professional fraudster.

Then again, here they were, in yet another civil/planetary war, so he'd been proven right, no?

In any ways, Lucas wasn't in either the mood or the situation to disapprove of the architectural style or engineering preferences of his forebears, especially since he was depending on it all to stay alive and free from bondage. The estate wouldn’t stop a determined national army, it couldn't realistically do that, but it could scare off mercenaries, church-whores and cult crazies who might want to kill him to claim the kudos for the act. Also, in reality, it was the thousands of jobs he controlled, with the families that depended on them, that weight of societal influence is what gave him the clout to negotiate with the municipal authorities on both sides of the river to obtain protection from openly known threats like the churches and political parties. The rest, the secret sects, the hidden money movements and the exchanges of favors in Ottawa would have to be detected and dealt with by his own employees. The WAC's facility was the biggest employer in the entire region; they would need to combine the airports, ship canals, public transit systems and public works of both sides of Sault-Sainte-Marie to equal his total head-count in the zone. As long as that was the case, Lucas could pull strings locally for help to defend the houses and working buildings of WAC’s, but just how much help would they get in this mess that engulfed the continent?

And that 'promised' help from the towns was contingent on his staying a nice, kindly neighbor who kept his weapons and trained militia inside his walls, out of view of the public. Given the nightmarish circumstances in the American side of things, that could change promptly. The USA side of SSM had stayed peaceful and livable because his many companies created such a large, unavoidable footprint in the social landscape. Nobody wanted to rouse the sleeping giant, nor give them a reason to leave the moated, walled and bunkered terrain they occupied for close to a century.

The expected result was too horrifying to contemplate.

For the elected officials, bureaucrats and lick-spittle's in both countries, at least.

But not for Lucas or his managers, since they had revised the domain's civil defense plans twice in the last five years, going so far as to use one of his other companies to build off-road enabled ambulances and firefighting trucks, in case climatic changes or industrial pollution caused damages and injuries inside his holdings. Building extra trains to increase the pace of deliveries to the wholesalers had been a costly but judicious choice, as those could now be used to gather and bring recruits for the workshops and militias he had instituted all around the USA side of operations. Now, what Lucas really needed were more armed patrol boats for the river, aircraft to link all the remote places he owned, and trucks to defend his grounds locally as he expanded his reach all around his many installations. Conversely, he needed to expand and solidify his network of train lines, then build some hovercraft to be able to move troops & cargo across water even in the winter months.
So, Empire building. Again.

"Oh, joy of joys. Guess Sid Meir's Civilization was back in fashion, after all." the young male thought bemusedly as he walked back towards the manor's main entry.

A dram of poison for your soul

(James Bond – generic saxophone theme)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 19:30pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 16:30pm
Secret bunker
Los Angeles, California, USA

Janet Noyce wiped a dirty rag down the length of a cheap wooden spoon that was covered in blood, bone shards and churned viscera mulch. The man chained on the table would not particularly care about her fussy cleanliness, but she wasn't expecting him to comment anymore. She had obtained the informations required to secure the escape of the CIA's runaway agents against the vengeance of Trumpists and White Supremacists, and so his death had finally occurred.

It was not a clean end, in keeping with the method of questioning.

The Swastika wearing idiot had bragged on open cellphone lines about his ability to guide the survivors of the White Christian Regency to the doorsteps of traitors and defectors, specifically ex-agents of the intelligence divisions and many federal police officers. He had even sent amateurish maps and lists of names/addresses by email to prove his capacity to deliver, in exchange of payment and participation in the hunt & execution of the traitors. What he promised was quite astounding, and very dangerous for a lot of Janet's friends and old colleagues if it happened to be true. Therefore, the old woman decided to abide the justified fears of her contact and proceed the capture and interrogation herself. She had the resources in place for decades, and this was exactly the reason for which they were made.

In the end of things, the man's fanaticism was matched only by his utter imbecility, but easily surpassed by his cowardice and lack of endurance for the treatments he was so willing to dish out. Janet had seen CIA cadets not finished with boot-camp who exhibited more gumption than this wiry rat, and they certainly knew better than to blab all day about pains they couldn't endure, or secret things they couldn't deliver. The twenty-eight years old wouldn't be able to denounce anybody, and the handful of men he had accidentally discovered would be safe again during their escape from the USA.

Gesturing to the pair of nondescript men wearing full body vinyl coveralls and helmets with air filters, she ordered them silently to unbind the carcass for disposal. One man opened the large cast iron door behind them, revealing the flaming core of an industrial furnace filled with incandescent wood logs and charcoal briquettes. The men now wheeled back the serving carts that held the various tools and chemicals used in their dire trade, liberating the passage for them to manually carry the dead body into the hellish pit. Five minutes of effort saw the skinny depraved fool stuffed into the voracious flames, all parts of him, and extra wood on top to insure a proper spread of the heat to guarantee a full cremation.

Without any comments to her unidentified assistants, Janet recovered her personal tools from the
main table, going to one of the four large janitor's sinks to wash them for stowing back in her purse. She heard the furnace's cast iron door close and lock, the two men leaving by their own individually reserved steel doors without any questions or comments either. Everybody involved in this meeting had known just enough to be present in the bunker hidden under the sewers of Los Angeles, and had the skill sets needed to accomplish the tasks, but knowing each other's identities or making small talk had never been in the job plans.

The elderly woman finished cleaning her tools, setting them in a drying basket hung inside the sink, then began the onerous process of removing the reusable vinyl coveralls she had worn to avoid the splashes of body fluids. She dropped the helmet, booties and bodysuit in the sink she had used for her tools, calmly walking away to the sliding steel door by which she had accessed the dreary chamber. She had only one key and it opened only this door, just as the other two men had their keys which released only their own private portals. Once she was locked into her private changing room, she heard the fourth steel door open to let in the person who was today's janitor to clean-up the torture room for the next time it was needed. The cleanliness was mandatory not for the comfort of the victims or interrogators, but to destroy all evidence of the presence of any specific person or item. Ever since the days of the American Revolution whence it became evident that stealing the technologies of enemies would be the feat determining who won conflicts, it also became obvious that hiding the activities of such espionage and torture of agents was paramount. Not only to protect a country's reputation as a people of kindness, but also to hide just how much they knew and from which sources it was obtained.

Janet put on her civilian clothes, a nice little pantsuit in tones of winter sky gray that fit loosely enough to hide the wrist rigs with her knives, the ankle holsters with drop-guns, and several sheaths with knives and small Derringer pistols hung under the arms on each side. A pair of solid steel hair pins stabilized her chignon, the locket had her neck held powdered poison, and her earrings were small explosives that reacted to open air. Opening her wide carpet bag, she put her wooden tools of misery in their proper slots, next to the Colt M1911 9mm pistol with scope & silencer, to keep the movements and noises to the minimal. then she inspected the small electronic boxes, the size of MP5 players, that jammed tracker signals, rerouted social media Live-Time updating, scanned & spoofed most security sensors, and the telephone ## capture & spoof device. With all the weapons, tools, and electronics positioned and active, she put on her glasses again, shouldered her handbag, and walked out of her private room by the same tunnel she had arrived.

Janet walked slowly, her mouth pursed tightly as she mentally revised the information gathered from the menial little bastard in the last few hours. As she kept an eye on the shadowy, damp, cement tunnel to maintain defenses in case of attack, the older spy couldn't help but be angry at the depths of perfidy that some people would lower to when trying to get money, alcohol, drugs or other payments. The traitor she had processed was a complete accident; not even an amateur PI or industrial spy who saw things he shouldn't have. No! The miserable fucktard was simply a local skinhead who'd heard and seen a few families quickly packing the most basic of belongings into large SVU's not their own for a one-way trip out of the country. The fanatical bigot had not even confirmed who the fleeing families were; he just saw the organized escape combined to big black SUV's and that was enough for him to concoct a conspiracy theory for sale on the web. The fact he had in fact spotted three agents amongst the 8 names he had listed was just pure bad luck for everybody involved.

Damn! What was the world coming to, that their good, honest agents were being spied upon and hunted by run-of-the-mill neighborhood skinheads, militias and church-whores? Weren't the foreign spies enough? Weren't there enough soldiers and spies from abroad without getting the cretins from their own backyard into the game?

The veteran spymistress walked slowly, deliberately letting her wide, heavy wooden 2 inch heels
clop loudly on the cement floor, the echo of her aggressive footfalls returning to her ears in a manner that soothed her raw nerves. This day was a waste. A bloody mess, quite literally, and a damned waste of time, resources, efforts and her own presence that could have been better used elsewhere. Sighing deeply in both aggravation and wrath, the elder CIA agent missed one critical clue that she wasn't alone in the tunnel, buried 70 feet beneath the streets of LA.

A small dull gray contraption crawled out of a broken ventilation grate, from a cement duct that brought in some tepid air from the Los Angeles subway tunnels about 200 feet to the left of Janet's path. The centipede-like robotic device had 24 legs on each side, a crest of short tentacles that ran half its length, small, nasty and sharp pincers on each leg, and a myriad of small blue eyes all over its body, making it devoid of front/tail anatomy. As Janet Noyce walked on, mired deeply inside her thoughts about the deteriorating landscape of the espionage world, the automaton moved quickly in the opposite direction, towards the hidden interrogation room and, hopefully, a secret computer server to hold the schedules, jobs, agents in attendance, supplies consumed and such. Even with the country in disarray, that information about the CIA's activities would be priceless at all times. The fact it was happening inside the borders of the USA, an illegal act according to the CIA's charter & by-laws, meant that internal political actors would be even more interested than foreigners.

(Sigrid – Everybody Knows)

Either way, somebody was going to make a wad of profit, if only because the four access tunnels each had their own little mechanical monster lying in wait, and the identities of the agents who came today would have a marketable value all of their own. Setting up the depraved little skinhead to take the fall by making certain his inept trawling for a cash-out cam to the appropriate eyes had simply been proper tradecraft in the Game. The Cold War may be finished, and most of the national countries may be dying quickly, but that didn't mean that truly good spies went out of business. They still had their survival, and their families, to tend to all the same.

As for whom it was that spied on Janet? Since he changed name thrice a day, it wasn't important; he'd be around, especially if it paid for him to become involved.

Homeward bound (cruel irony)

(SeaQuest – opening theme, season 1)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 21:00pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 18:00pm
UEO command tower; Section-7 detention level
New Cape Quest, Florida, USA

The young black soldier, dressed in the integrally black uniform with small silver insignias, walked around the prisoners, checking on the six-point harnesses, making certain that the specially conceived safety locks were sealed, the shackles closed tightly, and the length of steel chain between the limbs allowed just enough movement in the legs for ¾ strides at a regular pace.

No running allowed, and certainly not any escaping. The person who had ordered the restitution of these two had a bad habit of scorching an entire town off the map if an enemy was hiding inside. Making him angry by losing his parental units could only lead to him thinking they were complicit in their escape, to which he would react by vaporizing the UEO's planetary HQ, followed by most of New Cape Quest around it. There may be grumblings amongst the higher-ups, but nothing serious
because nobody was stupid enough to think they could out-glare the Basilisk II lasers. Not yet, anyways.

The six beige uniformed sailors of the UEO's regular security forces were arrayed at six points around the preparation hall, decked in body armor, helmets and brand new, very rare and expensive, pulse rifles with bayonets. These six were chosen specifically because they had no discoverable links to anybody called 'Wise', 'Wolenczak' or 'Holtzenstein' in their lives or that of first degree relatives. All sailors who had the least bit of a doubt about any past affiliations with churches, worship groups or any type of racial activism had been kicked out in the last two days, but there were still chances for somebody to just be greedy. This pair did have plenty of contacts and friends still around.

The never publicly admitted intelligence agency, Section-7, had checked, double checked, then had three external partners check again, to select the men for the short escort from the underground prison complex up to the seaplane piers that served the UEO's HQ building. For some reason, the young spy still felt unprepared, and nervous about the security and reliability of the setup he had created.

The junior lieutenant's stressful thought patterns were interrupted by the loud, violent banging of the armored steel door as it clanged off the cement wall without warning. Admiral William Noyce had come to personally lead the convoy of treasonous ex-spouses to their just desserts, as much for the fun of hurting the perfidious retards as to insure security by his own eyes.

"Well, well, well! Look at what we have here! In'nit cute! A pair of rich, important and very busy adults taking the time out of their busy schedules to go visit their one and only son at his dwelling. Oh, but my heart bleeds at such a truly white, christianly pure and conservatively sanctioned act! Hallelujah! That's one boy that'll know the meaning of Christmas this year, in'nit?"

"Fuck you off hard, Noyce!" roared Lawrence Wolenczak, always angry, violent, and ready to scream at anything that didn't go his way. Except that Noyce wasn't intimidated by his noises, only amused as evidenced by the wide smirk he now wore.

"Hawww, Cynti!" the rotund sailor simpered at the female of the duo, "No love for your poor widdle friend Willy? How rude of you!" he smarmed childishly, knowing full well how allergic to such behavior she was as it reminded her of Lawrence when he was drunk, which was often.

"The penal convoy is ready to leave, admiral." spoke the young spy, never bothering to give his name since the admiral knew him and nobody else in the hall had any right to his ID anyways.

"I can see that, soldier, I can see that indeed. But aren't they so beautiful like this? Homeward bound for the holidays and their only child's birthday on tomorrow evening." the elder officer expounded with much bombast and wide-armed gesticulations at the chained inmates before them.

Sniffing disdainfully, Cynthia Holtzenstein declared pedantically "Nobody thinks your inane pun about our being 'bound' for anything is amusing, Noyce. Only the immature, alcohol imbibed brain of an old piece of floating detritus such as yourself could find pleasure or amusement in it." the female lawyer griped nastily, pouring as much verbal virulence as she could in her sub-optimal circumstances.

Making a wide shit-eating grin that had more in common to his precious hogs than human features, the fat bald sailor leaned forward, invading the woman's personal space quite rudely to reply right in her face: "Oh, but I know. I know indeed, my dear friend. But since you're the one in chains heading for the butcher's block, and hooks, and knives... I do believe that I can indeed be amused by my own wits, as yours have already been found lacking, and been destined for the cesspit's inhabitants as their next meal."
Signaling to the Section-7 agent, Noyce turned on his heels, passing the open door to lead the convoy to the piers, and thusly out of his jurisdiction so that the paperwork associated with them went along the ways, too.

{ SQ } --- { A fateful au revoir } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 21:30pm

The heavy armored roll-down garage door activated, raising up the full 20 feet height of the cargo entry so that the funeste convoy could pass into the chilly evening air. There were almost no lights in the UEO building and annexes, with both the municipal areas of NCQ and Miami being only partially lit, as most people stayed in their homes but kept all signs of life invisible to avoid attracting criminals. After all, if there was light, then there was living people, which could only mean resources to sustain that life, or potentially humans to enslave for whatever reason you might have.

None of the soldiers said anything about the dreary climate, nor the social context around them; besides the rabid admiral and unknown S-7 agent, it just wasn't the time to talk about that stuff. They'd have plenty of time off-shift in the compound's cafeteria or in the bunks to gab about misery.

For Cynthia and Lawrence, this trip was a nightmare that was unfolding in the waking world. There were no ways to buy, rent, trade, bribe or bully their ways out of it. The chains were solid steel and the locks needed a special key that would be kept in NCQ since the matching copy had simply been manufactured in Sault-Sainte-Marie from the blueprints. Not a single chance for the inmates to escape the vehicle, let alone the individual restraints.

And now they saw the large plane, sitting on the sea waters, bobbing up and down gently in rhythm to the waves. The aircraft was a giant in her domain; 200 feet in length and wingspan, with a 20 foot wide body and two internal levels accommodating the steam boilers, cargo and passengers. Each of the four large piston engines had a 20 foot wide wooden propeller in front & back, and a black steel chimney atop the middle of the casing, slowly leaking white steam in the frigid night air. The cockpit was on the second level, in the nose of the vehicle, and the passenger's side door was opened, with a steel gang plank lowered in place to welcome arrivals.

Standing at the tip of the plank were four WAC's soldiers dressed in earthy brown uniforms composed of cargo pants, button shirts, heavy boots, belt-on body armor plates, gloves, trenchcoat and helmet with full-face opaque visor and air filters. Each soldier had a lever-action rifle with a bayonet and telescope, a pistol and hatchet in sheaths at the hips, and several knives all over.

The plane's pilot and commanding officer was standing at the top of the plank, near the plane's hull, looking on with clear contempt on his exposed face. He wore a combat uniform similar to the four infantrymen, except his was dull gray and the top of his helmet was molded to resemble an officer's forage cap with a bill and centered crest to show his rank & position.

The pilot waited for his soldiers to seize control of the prisoners before he walked down to meet the admiral, and give the necessary papers and signatures to take legal custody of the inmates. Once the soldiers gave the signal, the man moved off the plank to let them pull & push the prisoners to their fates while he processed the 'niceties' of the situation with the senior officer in charge.

Noyce settled everything in two minutes with a set of printed paper sheets already stamped and dated, to which he just manually put his signature with the Section-7 lieutenant acting as witness. The pilot separated the carbon copies for distribution, saluted and walked back aboard to the noises made by the screamed protests of their passengers who were shouting about inhuman treatment.

They were being put in the first level, in a closed cargo hold that juxted the boilers' pumps so that the
mechanical noises would dampen, and hopefully silence, their whining. The pilot ignored the goings-on of the infantrymen, marching straight to his cockpit and copilot to get this miserable show on the road.

It took another ten minutes for the soldiers to stow the prisoners and safely chain them to the walls of the hold, where they learned the compartment had been designed to ferry small livestock the size of goats, sheep, turkeys or such, rather than fully conscious humans. And so, the only facilities they had access to for the trip were the rolls of toilet paper on the locked pole, with the steel trellis floor as their privy. Flushing away the offal would be done with hot water from the boilers only once, upon arrival at the Sault-Sainte-Marie complex, not before. That was why there were a gas venting pipe to send the gases & odors to the plane's furnace, and two fresh air intakes in the ceiling brought slightly warmed air from the side of the plane.

Said steel trellis floor was also their seating, bedding and, well, you get the picture.

They had been told by the infantrymen that they did not get bed sheets because they were right next to the boilers' firebox, so heat would be constant throughout the flight. If they were thirsty, they would get a mug of water each, every hour during flight, but the tin mug was attached to a chain and kept outside the door at all times when not in use. They would pass the filled mug by the pass-tray slot in the door, not open the door itself until arrival at SSM complex. Further more, several cameras, microphones and sensors were built-in throughout the entire airplane, inside and outside, for analysis of the emergency flight recorder, or live-time crisis management if necessary.

Last note; their employer had given the order to ignore all complaints, threats, bribes, promises and such, but also told them to let the two adults beat the snot out of each other if it made them feel better.

It was also strongly intimated that the two adults would see the wrong end of police and military brutality if they made too much noise, to the point of forcing the soldiers or flight crew to come check on them without a truly life-endangering cause. They'd be in danger for real, if they did that.

All threats and orders spoken, the doors and portholes closed tight, the copilot called both control towers in NCQ and SSM to advise them of their departure and flight plans, with confirmation of live prisoners in hand for transport to tribunal under the Constable – Governor. The massive steam powered ship roared to life, belching great white clouds of scalding steam in the somber night winds as she sped on her take-off run, splashing chilled salted waters all around as she lifted into the skies.

Deep inside the cargo hold, Cynthia and Lawrence could only come to terms with the reality of their son's material wealth and power, personally and by alliance. This huge contraption couldn't work without a large ground crew to repair, fuel and clean it properly, and that was normally at both ends of a flight unless the plane always had roundabout flight plans for short deliveries. No, there were no ways by which the felonious parents could deny their child's accomplishments anymore, nor could they think up of a way that would make him scared of them again so that they could gain the upper hand in the coming days.

They were truly 'Homeward Bound' as Noyce had so callously said; emphasis on the 'bound'.

Slow evening in town

(Yule canticles – Mon Beau Sapin, in french)

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 21:11pm
Western America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 18:11pm
Lucas stood besides the desk in the master's office of the manor tower, taking advantage of the fact that his legs still cooperated with him willingly to enjoy being vertical for a while. He was looking quickly through the paper files that concerned the many cases against several lawyers of his own conglomerate, others from the Canadian and American governments, and multiple elected officials who had conspired with them. A lot of people mentioned were now retired or even dead, some for decades in fact, but many were still in place or in the employ of WAC as he read the lines of text.

My but this inheritance was getting soooo much more easy to finalize.

Snort! Not really, no.

The teenager could see pretty easily where & how he had been screwed over, since his birth in many cases, and since decades earlier than that in others. The frauds had begun in 1980, when it had been 1 year since the last contact from his great-grand-father with the company's central offices. Everything of a criminal nature since then had been the generational transfer and continuation of what was already in place. Some of the criminals were in this scheme as follow up to their grand-father, father and uncles whom had all worked for WAC, or near it in the two governments' offices that emitted the permits, licenses and tax numbers the conglomerate needed to operate legally.

Lucas pursed his lips in thought, as he contemplated just how widespread the scheme was, and just how high in the hierarchic pyramids of both partner nations. Given the age of the fraud in place, several dozen men who had been initiated into the system as mere schoolboys were now seated in the highest offices of authority, governance and justice on both sides of the North-American Mid-Line. Which meant that Lucas was basically facing judicial warfare against the very entities that conferred him his property titles, corporate licenses, and much vaunted Constable-Governor position with its diplomatic privileges and social standing.

Exhaling a long mournful sigh, the young male wondered if all the political miasma was truly worth the end result, and especially the mile-long list of mortal enemies that would result, regardless of whether he won or lost the fight. There were hundreds of high-level elected or nominated politos, senior bureaucrats, judges and military brass mixed in, and all of them wanted him to completely disappear into oblivion. Simply being quiet, minding his own business without complaints or court case would never be sufficient to get these people off his back. The men on this list were all thieves, fraudsters and embezzlers who actively siphoned monies, assets, resources and materials out of his inheritance, and they saw his being alive as a brake on their hijacking of such.

They wanted him dead.

The files given to him by Erasmus Chadderton were quite eloquent in that; the eldest men who had founded this system of fraud, embezzlement, extortion and theft, were all grouped tightly like a small sectarian cult. They had maintained tightly bound inter-familial relationships, right alongside the educational and professional relations. They had studied in the same schools and colleges, had done their apprenticeships at WAC then climbed up the company ladder or gone to work for their daddies' cabinet, just like said daddies had before them. The small group had grown its membership exclusively through birth and inheritance, almost cosanguine in how exclusively white, anglo-saxonie and evangelical they were. The upper crust of North-America's financial elite, all descended from the men who had founded the central institutions in Canada and the USA in the mid 1700's.

And they all saw him as the trublion, the parasite who was consuming what they illegally and
immorally believed to be their riches, resources and assets. They all saw him as the arrivist, the poor uneducated wannabe from a different country, compared to their own cultured native nobility. The fact their ancestors had either defrauded or stolen the land at gun point from the real natives was never something these pompous, hubris-driven fools ever considered since they said it wasn't real. By their little stories they transmitted from father to son, their ancestors in the 1600's had come to a completely wild land which they settled, and it was the presence of their pilgrims with good textiles and crafted metal wares that attracted the savages to come steal from them. By the same twisted rewriting of history, they said that Lucas' highly literate and educated ancestors were nothing but poor refugees that fled plague and war, and it was good, clean, pure white men that truly founded Wise Apothecary Co, and thus their claim to its wealth, lands and all.

They saw Lucas the same way they saw the natives on their reservations, or the cultural minorities stuck in the ghetto's of large American and European cities. Subhuman wastes good only to wipe the floors and toilets, and even then, only if a robot wasn't available for the task. Well, if they thought that their racist dreams would work any better than their ageist bigotry, they were all in for a rude awakening that nothing would protect them from.

"Ahem." someone cleared their throat softly next to the entry doorway. Raising his head, Lucas saw it was his assigned butler, Raphael Chadderton, but dressed for traveling in winter climate at night, with thick boots instead of interior shoes, and a long trenchcoat bearing the WAC logo. In fact, the coat, hat, gloves and scarf were all the same as the soldiers wore, except for the color being the basic black & gold of the House servants' livery with the logo done in gold tones as well. The young adult had a calm, neutral expression on his face as he stood with his long winter coat opened, hands stuck into the deep side pockets of the thick garment.

"I see you have decided to accompany me during my slow night in town." Lucas commented as he closed the paper files, then ordering them in the desk drawer which he closed and locked. Putting the keys back in his jacket pocket, the teenager grasped his armament-cane from where it leaned against the desk and walked over to the waiting servant. "You don't have any obligations to travel at night with me, you know?" he asked, wondering why the other boy was doing this.

"Nah... I'm getting bored inside this old pile of bricks. I'm twenty years old, I need some life in my life, ya know? You don't get a lot of that inside the manor walls at night, or much of any other time either, come to think of it." Smirking brattily, Raphael mock-whispered "Apparently, there's something about the big tall walls with guns that scares people away from visiting the house. Who knew? I was sure it was the drab old wallpaper and gloomy victorian wood millings on the ceilings, but no; it's the feudal architecture that people can't let pass."

Exhaling a deep sigh, Lucas shook his head glumly, asking aloud "I'm gonna have to live with you for a loooong time, aren't I?" skepticism and negativity dripping from his words.

"Only until I get a better job offer." replied the young adult with playful effrontery.

"I'll pay for your moving and retraining, if it can make it happen sooner." came back Lucas, wearing a shitty grin of his own as he slid on his trenchcoat and scarf.

"Not in this decade," sassed Raphael, "not unless you want to be the only living thing inside this heap of cold stones that's younger than the servants. Well, besides the mold in the basement, but we're not sure just when it began growing, sooo..."

"Not a problem," the adolescent replied quite glibly, "as a certified research pharmacologist, I'm well at ease with hundreds of mold species. In fact, I have more of a rapport with them than you, given that mold, at least, is respectful of the person holding the microscope. Unlike you."
Snorting in amusement, the 20 year old waved a hand nonchalantly, obviously not bothered. "I will respect your microscope easy enough, but you, that'll take time. At least until I see the first paycheck with your signature on it. Then, it'll be real that you're my boss."

"I wonder if this manor was truly built according to the old Edwardian and Victorian principles or it just has the looks." Lucas asked aloud to the empty air around them as they began to walk down the large decorative staircase. His legs were in good health, he was going to enjoy them while they lasted.

Taking the bait, Raphael asked gamely with a big boyish smile "And why would that matter? What would be the difference? It would still be a moldy pile of rock that's wet and cold all year long."

The teenager answered with a smile that was all teeth: "Because in these epochs of society it was normal for the Lord of the House to maintain order, discipline, and utter obedience, by confinement or diverse types of corporal punishments, not only on his children or grand-children, but also on his wife, his servants and house 'chattel'. This activity being rather noisy and bothersome for the rest of the household, the very practically-minded people of the epoch always included a 'punishment room' or 'seclusion quarters' in the design of the mansion. Sometimes in the basement, or a bigger attic than needed, or as an external extension abutting the main house for easy access in winter."

Blinking slowly, Raphael glared at his employer as he realized what the younger male was hinting at, concerning his general health. "Are you somehow, in some roundabout ways, trying to threaten to whip my ass into shape if I don't suck up to you? The young adult crossed his arms over his chest, so that even with the thick layers of clothing it was obvious he was more athletic and bulky than Lucas. It was a blatant attempt at physical intimidation that Lucas was well passed being impressed with, unfortunately for the poor servant who had no real idea of what his employer really was.

The younger male waved an indolent left hand as he climbed down the steps besides his companion for the evening, not in the least worried by the other's display of manly musculature. "Of course not. I saw you in those fitted black trousers this afternoon, and I can admit honestly that your physical shape is already just fine for a young man of your age. No help needed about that. Not that your well toned physiology would detract from the usefulness of the method, if it came to be. No, I was more leaning towards locking you inside the seclusion zone, to no longer hear your awful sense of humor, since it grates on my poor frayed nerves. I'm not as young as I used to be, and my patience for childish banter has waned along the way," the boy elocuted in an off-hand manner that showed he wasn't serious, for now anyways.

Scratching at his head, Raphael mused aloud uncomfortably "I can't for the life of me figure out what's worse? That you want to lock me in a soundproof room, or that you actually noticed what I look like, especially in that damned drab servant's livery that hangs just awful on my type of body frame. T's way too tight around the shoulders and chest to be comfortable, too." He mumbled thoughtfully as he walked, eyeing his employer sideways to make certain he could perceive the boy's true emotions, just in case he really were angry at him.

"I wouldn't say too tight..." replied a teasing Lucas, still smiling widely as he slid his innuendo past the guard of the preoccupied young adult. "Although I can't wait to have you escort me around the working areas of the compound in the coming weeks. Seeing you in jeans and a T-shirt should be quite a treat for my poor lonely eyes."

Raphael turned his head to Lucas so fast that he almost missed the third floor landing where they needed to pass into the main house to reach the main entry. "Waddya said?" he asked flustered since he had no idea whether his new employer was serious or not. Being the rich guy's plaything had never been part of the job description, nor had being his stress relief via acting as punching bag.
"Oh, nothing. Just the elucubrations of a teenaged boy in need of food. My stomach was talking for me; it tends to do that, when I haven't eaten in a while." the pale skinned boy replied quite insincerely as he passed the third floor's lintel and armored doors with the armed guard that saluted him.

"I'm starting to see what my mother was telling me, about enjoying myself as the only child in the manor when the others got schooled elsewhere. Having younger kids around really does suck for the oldest." griped Raphael, along with a sad pouted lower lip for good measure. He was stuck with his own thoughts and insecurities for a few minutes as Lucas became pensively silent during their trek through the venerable old mansion, until they reached the decorative stonework front porch.

The doors were opened by the nightwatch soldier who interrupted their progression with a message for Lucas. "The majordomo left this envelope and letter for you sir. He said it was important that you take it before leaving the manor's walls."

Nodding in thanks, the adolescent took the large brown envelope that emitted a soft metallic noise as it moved. Opening it, Lucas withdrew the letter and a brass ring with around 30 keys, each rather long, thick, and graven on both edges, both sides, and had a filament of crystal running in the middle. The letter explained that these were the security keys for the Manor & dependencies, the working buildings, and employee housing blocks situated inside the Sault-Sainte-Marie complex, on both sides of the river. A second brass ring with a dozen similar keys was supposed to grant access to emergency wartime shelters hidden in the forests surrounding the complex and town. To make things easier, the large oval head of each key was inscribed with the address or name of the building it opened on one side, and a miniature map of the area on the reverse. That was quite a pocket-load of metal to carry around, but Erasmus insisted in his missive that the young Constable – Governor needed to be able to assess his properties at his leisure, at any time he wished, without prior arrangements. The bunkers were a question of basic survival, especially in these trying times. It was preferable for all in the employ of the WAC conglomerate that Lucas stay alive and as healthy as possible, given that all suggested alternatives involved dismantling the company at the hands of traitors and church-whores.

[ SQ ] --- { Not another old shite! } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 21:30pm

It took a few minutes for Lucas to find space on his already packed equipment system but it got done, so the trip to the town for his birthday evening could progress with minds at peace. At least until he saw the two vehicles waiting outside, and what kind of car he would be riding in. The swears and cusses in over 25 languages certainly made an impression on the driver and four escort soldiers who would be coming with them out of the walls.

Clacking his armament-cane's butt-mace menacingly on the stonework steps of the grand stairs as he descended, the teenager's fuming was neither subtle nor silent. Everybody around knew something bad had just happened, but nobody knew what.

A fucking BLOODY Mercedes-Benz 1938-Großer 770K (W150) from Nazi Germany.

A damned symbol of oppression and tyranny!

The 1938 MB-770K was the car of choice for rich, powerful, and often depraved, men of stature and Power amongst humanity. Adolf Hitler loved the damned thing so much that he owned one for each of his properties, and had the III-Reich government buy several dozen to park around the country to keep available for high officials who visited the area. The MB-770K was called 'The Grosse' or 'fat' because it had a chassis that was much wider and longer than normal, with two large rear banquettes.
each seating three bulky adult men, plus the driver and escort seats in the front. It had superior suspensions for a smooth ride on Europe's roads which were still mostly packed-dirt paths, helped by thick cushions and superior upholstery coverings. Further visual appeal and signs of luxury were the genuine varnished mahogany wood for the dashboard, steering wheel, and all switches or levers. There were electrical headlamps outside to see the road at night with smaller bulbs inside to read during the trip, which was an incredible novelty and luxury for that epoch. The car could be ordered with a fixed roof or as fully convertible, which was the Nazi favorite since it allowed the officials to stand in the car to wave at the crowds as the vehicle moved with parades and processionals.

The Mercedes-Benz 1938-Großer 770K (W150) was such a resounding success that Hitler had the habit of giving one to each close friend, ally, or what he considered personages of high import to society at the time. That meant Marshal Ion Antonescu, Benito Mussolini, Francisco Franco, Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, and Emil Hácha, along with several of the petty dictators in the puppet states that kowtowed to the III-Reich. And, of course, since Franklin Henry Wise was one of his closest collaborators, friends and confidants, so the tyrant gave the family a fucking Benz.

A big brick-brown colored Benz.

Palming his face with his left hand, leaning on his cane with the right hand to keep himself from just dropping his body to the snowy cobbled driveway, the teenager silently despaired of ever affranchising his person and family from the inter-generational soul-stain of F. H. Wise, and all the afferent crapulent bloody mess he had wrought.

Raising his eyes to glare malevolently at the shiny, freshly washed, brown car that spoke of luxury and exalted social standing, even amongst the rich and tasteful, Lucas could only groan as he realized how expensive that made the vehicle. Back then, the old joke from Henry Ford was that "you can get your car in any color you wanted, so long as it was either black, black, or black." The reason was because a lot of the colors taken for granted in 2020 didn't even exist back in 1930-40, so neither the dealers nor manufacturers could do anything else than sell you something that was basic steel-work black or a well finished, smooth-painted black. If you wanted a different color, you had to call the fabrication shop and pass a custom order, payable in advance, and you supported the cost of the work team all by yourself for that one build. The price was such extravagance that nobody ever asked that.

Except, of course, when you run the government with secret arrests & executions. Hitler had several bypasses around the normal constraints of mortal men that allowed him many realizations that others of the day would not even be able to dream about. His good friend Her Doktor Wize had liked brown as it was the classic color of the suits worn by the learned professors in all the Ivy League universities since the old black togas had been rescinded. It was also the color of the bricks and steel of his manors, workshops and heavy cargo ships, so he had learned young to love all shades of earth-brown. No problems! A phone call and three months of research later, and the Mercedez-Benz company was shipping out a customized – armored – Grosse to America for one of the Fuhrer's personal friends.

Making an enraged hand-wave at the driver and escorts, Lucas skipped all the spiel he had prepared about not needing an armed convoy to follow him since the forest-green armor-plated jeep was such an eyesore, and a provocation to all who saw it. Forget that! If anybody recognized the Benz for what it was, he’d need all the tanks, APC's and field artillery he could get to save his scrawny albino hide.

Fuck, but he hated his life these days!

"Just get to your seats and drive me to a damned chinese buffet somewhere in town!" growled the
raging teenager, no longer in a joking mood about anything. What would his stupid ancestor ask of
him next? That he build a functional copy of Dachau to use as large-scale bread & pizza baking
factories to feed the masses? Maybe he should take for granted he would soon be competing with
Weston, Gadoua, Dr Oetker, Vachon, and other giants of the baked food industry.

Damn, but he hated his introculi of a forebear these days!

{ SQ } --- { Finally; some peaceful, quiet time } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 22:00pm

The two vehicle convoy circulated peacefully along the streets of Sault-Sainte-Marie in the northern
sector of the town. Lucas had decided to stay in the Canadian sector of the municipality for the
moment, until he could establish his position and credibility with the US side of the border. That,
however, seemed to be on hold as the state governor of Michigan had been killed on his way to the
office during the second day of the civil wars. The rest of his family had followed, mere hours after
being told of his demise. Given the power vacuum and lack of credible replacements, nobody could
foresee how long it would take for the situation to regularize itself enough to have somebody
responsible on the other end of the phone line to speak with.

Honestly, Lucas now feared that he would have to take over all of Michigan and several other US
states that abutted his territory, if only to keep their violence and chaos from spreading inside his
zones of control to prevent damage to his operations and employees. His people followed him
because he had proven to be a careful manager, agile politician and strategic war commander, but
they would desert in droves if he failed to step up to the problem correctly with a working solution in
hand. Fortunately for him, he did tend to come by solutions and resources rather quickly, if not
easily, cheaply, or without bloodshed.

The small armed convoy left the WAC – SSM compound through the main north gate, next to the
public SSM Airfield. They rolled along the length of the runways towards the north, on Airport
Drive, then east on the street called Second Line West until they reached the heart of SSM town.
From there, the driver of the hated Benz turned a few times until he found a small building with the
desired kind of eatery, parking in the lot besides the restaurant. It wouldn't be a chinese buffet,
contrary to what Lucas had asked for in his moment of anger, since the only few places in town were
pretty ordinary and closed at 22h00pm, so they would be too late anyways. Instead, the driver had
suggested to his employer that he try the Embers Grill & Smokehouse on Albert Street, since they
were opened up to 2h30am on wednesdays. A quick call by Raphael before departure had confirmed
that they were indeed open for business, so a reservation was made on the fly for 7 persons. The
driver had been surprised to hear that the four soldiers, butler and himself got included, especially
when Lucas confirmed that the company would take the whole bill to make certain the men could
enjoy their late trip into town without extraneous worries about paying for it.

Their arrival was silent and ignored by the neighborhood since it was mostly commercial and
therefore almost completely deserted at this hour of the evening. Even with the Christmas holiday
season reaching peak, the planet-wide violence and e-bank collapse had stunted the partying & gift
shopping ardors of most people who now hid in their houses with the lights closed. Besides, with the
Canadian government having declared martial law with a ban on all religious activities, even in
private properties, it wasn't like would-be revelers had much left to party about, let alone religious
events.

As he got out of the ostentatious antique car, Lucas hoped dearly that his little excursion to give
himself a morale boost for his birthday wouldn't come back to bite his bony pale ass. He didn't have
much luck went it concerned his personal life, especially when giving himself material pleasures. It
was like the Multiverse had a 'thing' for making him hope, only to quash everything at the last second. He dearly hoped that tonight would not end up short, or with an explosion of recriminations and violence.

"Heu, sir? Are you sure you want us grunts to be with you inside?" Asked the Ensign in charge of the jeep. Franklin Henry Wise had always liked the discipline and decorum of the Navy's ships, so he had patterned all the ranks and specialties of 'Forceful Wisedom' private security in a similar system. "There's a Tim Horton's just a few streets over. Us guys could go there until you're done."

The Benz driver stayed silent, not knowing his employer at all therefore having no idea of how he thought, nor what his mood was after the outburst at the manor. The teenager had been completely silent during the entire trip since he had accepted the suggestion for the restaurant.

Raphael Chadderton did want some explanations, if only to learn more about his new boss. "Yeah, it isn't common for a rich guy to invite the lower men like that." The young servant queried further gently "Is there a reason you insist on us coming in? Are you expecting an attack, or you're afraid the US civil wars will spill over the border tonight?"

Lucas tapped his cane on the parking lot's frozen asphalt twice, pursing his lips and sighing loudly in exhaustion as he did. The frigid climate condensed a small cloud of white vapor before his face as he exhaled his loneliness. Looking each man in the eyes as he answered the questions, the adolescent made certain each saw the truth of his feelings. "I'm lonely. I want company for a change. I have been sick for two years now, and rarely leave my dwelling unless it's a medical appointment, which sucks a lot at any age, but especially when you're young, supposed to be athletic and active." Shoving his free hand in his coat pocket, he half-shrugged vaguely. "I have no social life, no friends, no contacts outside work, and even the people from Stanford are more interested in my research than my person. The week of my birthday is always a fucking bust because it's bloody Christmas that everybody's worried about, so I'm usually cast aside by everybody until their families and sectarian creed have been satisfied."

Now as utterly depressed as he had been trying to avoid becoming all day, the boy sighed miserably again. "I thought I could use this little sortie to learn more about the people and families that have served my family for decades, even when I didn't know about it. I need to start seeing you as living, feeling, people instead of just the raw statistics that the lawyers and accountants insist you are. I don't want to become the sort of employer who judges a person's worth by their profit margin like Trump did, or make believe that Wise Apothecary is a Prosperity Gospel cult where money and Power matter more than living beings."

Trying desperately not to sound as forlorn and sadly despondent as he felt inside, Lucas shrugged dismissively, uncertainly, looking smothered by his thick trenchcoat as he did. "So, I'm inviting you all to a steak dinner, but with some afterthoughts too. On the other hand, if you all really prefer a coffee & doughnut snack, feel free to use the Benz to carry you all. I will call you back when I need to leave. With my legs, driving isn't safe. Plus, I have no experience at driving in winter, anyways."

The young male steeled himself a bit then walked towards the front door of the establishment, happy to see that all six of his employees followed him. Maybe this evening wouldn't be a bust after all.

The restaurant's majordomo was a middle-aged woman dressed in a smart business suit with an artificial blue flower in the left breast pocket of her jacket. She smiled at the group, but it seemed artificial, more so than usual when dealing with service personnel in hospitality. Lucas wondered if it were the company they worked in, the weapons several of them carried openly, or maybe...

"Raphael, do we have an account in this place?" the teenager asked. "Unless their credit card terminal works, I can always write a cheque from Wolenbahn."
Shaking his head negatively as he undid his long trenchcoat, the servant answered "No, the conglomerate directorate doesn't usually come here for meals with important clients or politos. They prefer to have everything done inside the manor itself, or in the conference room at the management edifice by caterers." Pulling a thin locking aluminum case out of his jacket's inner pocket, the young man showed the round, golden WAC logo on it. "I took some cash out of the household safe in prevision of expenses. The reporters on the CBC's six o'clock news warned that the economic collapse had caused more than 60% of card terminals and ATM's to no longer function. They told people to foresee having to pay in cash or barter for the coming months, unless they had a deal in place with the merchant."

"Ah, good." turning to the majordomo, the youth asked gently "Does your terminal work, or do you need solid money for this meal? We have both, and understand that times are not easy for anybody." He tried to reassure the woman, hoping they wouldn't be told to leave. It was entirely possible the management wanted to close the place for the night as it seemed that Lucas' group were in fact the only clients in the establishment.

Attempting a truer smile, the woman still fell short but it showed she was genuine in her emotions; it was the stress of events that was affecting her so badly, not their group or gear. "Please! No! Don't leave yet, not before you try something. Besides, you can choose any table you want. It's not like you'll have to hustle for it. Go seat yourselves as you like while I get the waiter to bring the water, bread and olive oil saucers."

Seeing the true reasons of the stiff reception, the seven new arrivals decided to give it a chance. It wasn't them that the restaurant staff had a beef with, and nobody could help the mess outside anymore, even if they wanted to. Things were just too advanced, and too far spread, for anybody to be able to change the course of events by themselves anymore. Even Lucas could only survive, not thrive for real, in these circumstances if he were removed from his company and employees.

The seven people chose a wide 12-seat table near the kitchen doors, which afforded them a view of the pass-plate and exposed them to the pleasant warmth from the adjoining room. As they placed their travel clothes on the nearby wall-mounted coat hooks and shelves, a duo of waiters came by with two carafes of water, two wicker baskets of warm bread rolls and four saucers of olive oil. They lit the small candles nested inside decorative sculpted glass globes on the tables, pulling out the chairs and placing menus at each place setting. Raphael discreetly guided Lucas to sit in the middle with his back to the wall, with the four soldiers split two to each external sides of the group, while the driver and himself sat in front of their employer with their backs towards the room. The adolescent accepted the clearly defensive arrangement but let out a soft, disparaging snort of amusement as he sat down to enjoy his evening.

Their main waiter was a young black male in his mid-twenties, sporting very short hair and a goatee with small round bronze-framed glasses. He was putting away his lighter as he asked politely "Will you want any aperitifs, tea, coffee, Perrier seltzer, or other aperitif whilst you study our menu?" He took out a small paper notepad and pencil to scribble the orders he would get. These were important clients, and the only ones they had since 19h00pm, so it behooved all of the staff to make certain they wanted to come back soon. Their restaurant and families' very survival depended on this meal.

Lucas opened the conversation with a playful "I have diplomatic immunity, so I can drink alcohol if I want to celebrate my 16th birthday that way. On he other hand, the bevvy of meds I take each day for infections would definitely not react well to booze, so I'll stick to some tea. Is it bags or loose leaf?" Making a face of disgust, the teen said "If it's bagged, I'd rather have a cappuccino than taste the chlorine they bleached the paper with." Seeing the smirks on the six faces around him, he griped out at them "So what? I'm choosy about my tea. It's called being civilized, you jerks! You should try it sometime." Then, turning to the waiter, he explained with an affected air of false wisdom "They
don't have many chances to leave the compound, but if you give them a chance I'm sure they'll learn fast."

Faced with a clearly amused waiter and six exclamations of protest, the youth smiled widely as he opened the leather-covered menu to see what was the chef's recommendation for the day. He was pleased to see a full selection of red meat, white meat, fish and vegetarian plates. Thankfully, Canada had never succumbed to the temporary craze of the cult-like vegans that swept the USA in the early 2000's, resulting in a short-lived but damaging ban on the industrial ranching of cows for either milk, meat, leather or bones. Overturning that idiotic law sponsored by religion-driven Hindis and similar sects combined with resident vegetarians & vegans thrown in was perhaps the only good thing the Trump administration did, in 2017, right upon taking the reigns in DC. The eleven years that this ban lasted was the least prosperous period for American farmers, nor the best in terms of culinary experiences. The other idiotic thing was that the ban covered raising cattle inside the USA but never forbade the import, so the meat & by-products still came in, just from further and at a higher price for every step of the process.

The driver of the Benz, an older caucasian white gentleman called Lenny Herschel, was tearing a small piece of bread to dip in the olive oil as he ordered a regular Perrier with lemon slice on ice. In the same vein as his employer, he joked about the fact he was the designated driver to justify avoiding anything strong for the evening. Raphael visibly deflated as he griped that the legal drinking age in Ontario was 21 so he was still dry for another miserable year, so he'd settle for a club soda on ice. The four soldiers joked around for a few minutes as they decided who would be their driver on the way back, then ordered a pitcher of ale on tap for the three that could drink safely, leaving their disgruntled comrade to order a club soda with lime. The waiter left them to peruse the menus in peace while he fetched their chosen aperitifs.

Lenny commented with a snort "You should have the 20oz rib steak, boss. You're way too thin for your age, and you're sick to boot. Ya need meat on them bones to get better. I've seen matchsticks fatter than ya're skinny arse."

Ignoring the good natured ribbing from the others, Lucas concentrated on reading the entire menu while promising himself some vengeance at a later date. He was good at multitasking like that, so he'd remember in due time. Let them laugh; he would have his turn.

One of the four soldiers must be a telepath as he scoffed aloud "Are you daft, man? That's the guy that popped a volcano on the side of Lake Erie, two days ago. If he can do that, what makes you think he can't get back at your smart-ass mouth for that jab?" the unimpressed fighter shook his head in dismay as he quickly checked the Host's Table to find something to his liking as he tore a chunk of bread too.

The older man replied in good fun "Cuz he'd have to find someone else to drive that beast around, and I don't think he'd want the hassle of another recruitment tryout on top of everything else he's got going on in the job." He popped the new piece of oil-dipped bread in his mouth, a wide smile showing he was quite amused by the way things were unfolding.

Raphael shook his head sideways as he replied "He hates the damned car with a passion. He'd rather drive around with the soldiers in an Armored Personnel Carrier than use that wheeled brick. And since the soldiers are already on duty and paid for, I wouldn't get too comfortable with the boss yet; he could still think you deserve to get binned along with the Nazi-era horror you drive." Then, wearing an epic smirk, the young servant added brattily "But take it this way: he hates the car so much that you could probably haggle to get it as a retirement bonus when he flushes you down the pipes. You could easily have a career as a historic limousine driver for grand occasions that way, at no initial cost."
Shaking his head in mild denial, Lucas mumbled distractedly "Nahn, I'll keep the despicable thingie in a cold, dark, wet cellar so that I can send you down to wash and polish it when you bother me too much with your inane chatter. Honestly! Your kin should have been called 'Chattertrap' instead of 'Chadderton'. Talk about misnaming things. It's willful false advertisement, I tell y'all," the teen snarked with a wide smirk as the older boy again wallowed in uncertainty at his employer's sense of humor towards him.

The group were still laughing in their menus when the kitchen door opened to let out their waiter who was escorted by the establishment's main chef. As the young male deftly passed out the drinks on his tray, a second waiter, a young native woman barely twenty years old with long black hair, came bearing a steaming porcelain teapot with a small ceramic stand that held a tealight. She placed the brazier on the table next to Lucas, moving carefully since the candle was already burning, then set the teapot atop the decorative stand to keep warm. Smiling at her adolescent client, she presented the tray on which sat six different little tin pots of tea.

"Here we have the teas selected by our Barista." She presented with a soft smile and kind tone. "They are all loose leaves, organically grown in open-air fields, no chemical pesticides, and the workers are part-owners of the plantation. We have six varieties; Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Arabian, British and Russian style blends. I will gladly prepare it as you require, and will bring out the condiments to match."

Nodding, Lucas chose "The British blend, please, with cream and liquid honey."

The young woman expertly took one spoon of loose shredded leaves from the appropriate tin to stuff a small perforated steel ball that hung from a chain, which she set to steep in the teapot. Closing the lid over the chain, she gestured at her colleague, standing besides them with his notepad in hand.

"Go ahead and order, your tea will be ready when everyone has chosen their meal. This blend needs between three and five minutes of steeping to be optimal, the longer the darker the waters."

Nodding his acceptance, the teen was about to speak his choice first, since he was the employer and reason they were all here to begin with, when the chef cleared his throat to speak before him. "I apologize for interrupting you, but I was told that you mentioned some medical concerns? Are there any food allergies that we should be aware of? Any medications that make your stomach produce more acid, or the reverse, slower digestive processes? I will need to know what to watch out for when the team prepares the orders," he queried politely, thus explaining his presence. Well, that plus some curiosity as to whom could be out in group at this hour of the day, given the social situation all around them. Not many people could afford this type of upper mid-class meal these days, so the few rich types left were bound to warrant curiosity every time they came in.

Giving his most wan, harmless smile available, the teenager replied "I have some damages to my legs that have resulted in long-term infections and cramps, but nothing that causes allergies. I do take anti-acids periodically for heartburn, so no changes there either. Thank you for asking."

With no other medical situation or allergy to compose with, the chef stood by to advise the clients on their choices since he was already present. No sense in leaving right away; that could be interpreted by the clients as if he didn't care about their patronage, and people had left the table without ordering for lesser offenses in the past.

"Well, it's my birthday tomorrow night but I'm celebrating tonight. We don't know what the government will do in terms of allowing public movements, so I'm not taking any chances. So, I'm gonna live wild for a change. Get me the New York sirloin tournedos wrapped in bacon, medium – well done, with dark maple & peppercorn gravy, pub fries and grilled veggies. I would prefer the french onion soup for starter, no salad or anything else. I'll decide on dessert later. Thank you."
The men heckled him in good natured fun, asking where he planned to put all that food since the main course alone was bigger than his thin, meatless frame. The adults were still laughing at his pout and crossed-arms stance as they passed their own orders for steaks, ribs, salmon fillet and roast chicken enough to feed a small army. Which, you know, they incidentally happened to be.

The meal progressed slowly since nobody was in any hurry, and no pressing appointments or emergencies were waiting for them back at the manor. Everything was either 'current business' or classed as 'war measures' but even that was fast becoming just ordinary business in this period.

{ SQ } --- { Friendly conversations } --- { SQ }

Eastern America; Wednesday 23rd of December, 2020; 23:46pm

The seven men ate through their meals at a leisurely pace, not in any hurry to move, and since neither perceived any threats from the staff, all plausible reasons to go back on the road in the cold were clearly voided. A situation that pleased everyone as Mother Nature had decided to grace them with a light, slowly drifting dusting of powdery white snow, starting at 22:45pm while they were at the first bites of their main course. Seeing yet more snow had convinced the convoy team that the return trip could wait; it wouldn't hurt anybody.

By some miracle of who-knew-what, a family of five young people had knocked on the door of the restaurant at 23:00pm, asking the waiter if the place was still open, and what kinds of money or trades they accepted for some food and using the bathrooms. The young siblings were quickly ushered inside and seated so the majordomo could speak with them in a more settled manner. They were on their way to see their grand-parents, on a farm outside Sault-Sainte-Marie town, but the roads in the outlying rural areas weren't cleared correctly. The family had decided to try their luck for a night inside the village, instead of foolishly braving the nonexistent paths since they didn't think they'd get any sorts of roadway assistance if they crashed. The majordomo made a quick deal with the young people for five simple hot meals at a kind price, a much better outcome than either side had thought to get tonight, given how empty the streets and few open restaurants were.

Wanting warmth after going on for hours in the dark night on empty, unlit rural roads, the young adults and teenagers sat at a pair of four-seat tables near the WAC group, curiosity and anxiety written plainly on their features. As the meal progressed, a flow of carefully spoken conversation began to settle between the two small groups.

"We're all brothers and sisters," explained a young girl who was close to Lucas' age. She had brown hair tied in a loose tail that brushed the tops of her shoulders, clear expressive brown eyes and white skin gently pinked by the intense cold outside. "We were living with our parents in the Greater Toronto Metropolitan Area when things hit the fan, so the old folks decided to ship us out to the forest. We have been driving for the last two days to reach here, because the roads aren't all plowed right so even switching drivers at night wasn't enough. We got stuck twice, but thankfully managed to get ourselves out of the snow. Nobody was coming, and the 911 operators told us they weren't sure the answering center would be manned much longer, either. Anybody on the roads outside a town is on their own risks, because no one will come to help them. As it was, we were lucky that the service stations we passed allowed us to buy gas for the car or we'd be stuck squatting in an abandoned building, away from home and without support to get anywhere." She offered further as her relatives took off their heavy winter coats, hats, gloves and scarves to reveal fleece sweater-vests and thick denim jeans underneath the traveling gear.

The group of displaced siblings was hesitant to give more than those generic details, especially in light of the many weapons the soldiers carried, and the high quality clothes worn by what were obviously two servants for a rich person. Since the only one to wear a regular business suit and be
seated in the middle like a king was in fact Lucas himself, it didn't take long for the group of siblings to have doubts about the protection detail. The other big detail that spoiled the secret was the fact the restaurant's majordomo was hovering near the large table, making certain the teenager always had everything well in reach before it was asked for, and the chef had come in person at the end of the main course to inquire of their opinions on his team's efforts.

The small family of two twenty-somethings and three teens were starting to feel distinctly out of sorts since this wasn't the type of restaurant they would eat at unless they were on a hot date, or trying to impress a potential employer. Even the 'simple' meals they bargained for were much better than the usual fast-food fare they normally bought, and the service at the tables hadn't been any less kind and efficient despite the situation. The oldest sibling, a twenty-three year old man with slightly tanned white skin, green eyes and short-buzzed brown hair kept pursing his lips in fear as he side-glanced at the convoy group periodically. The second eldest, a twenty-two year old woman who looked like her younger sister as if they were twins seemed far more positively impressed than her brother. The two youngest teen boys were switching from concentrating on their unexpected hot food or gawking at the long guns each soldier had leaned against the table in hand's reach. The lever-action rifles had full telescope, bayonet, flashlight, laser pointer and under-slung M203 40mm grenade launcher in a way that Canadians were not used to see displayed so brazenly in their streets.

As the convoy group finished clearing their excellent main course, the majordomo surprised them with a rectangular glass platter that held three dozen miniature sculpted cakes and pastries shaped in the expected christmas motifs. Small pine tree shaped doughnuts made green by mint icing, chocolate reindeer cakes with a red cherry nose, yule logs in various colors and flavors, small gingerbread houses dusted white with baking sugar for snow and sprinkles for festive lights, and phillo pastry pouches filled with apple slices, ginger, maple caramel and basted red with cherry sauce to look like Santa's gift bags. The culinary artistry was impressive, matched the quality of the meals, and was a welcome closure to a succulent birthday feast that made Lucas happy he had chosen to take the risk. He promptly asked for a red pouch to stay in the birthday theme of gifting some happiness to himself.

"Man, those are neat!" one teen boy from the small family exclaimed at the sight of the dessert platter being offered to the neighbors. "It certainly beats the dumb Vachon log cakes we normally buy at the grocery store this time of year. Every. Damned. Year." he complained with a big smile that showed this was an old fight, especially when the four other siblings had matching expressions that showed they fully supported the younger boy.

The teen girl made a face of disgust as she detailed the problem for their amused neighbors; "They're good enough cakes, you know, for stuff that's one quarter the price of what you could buy in a real bakery shop. But the moment you open the plastic wrapper, you have about three days to eat it all or it drys out until it's hard like a cinder-block, and nothing can soften it again. I know! I tried EVERYTHING, damn it!"

"My sister is a sugar bug," informed them the boy who had made the initial comment. "She hasn't yet seen a cake or pastry she couldn't eat, or add more icing, sprinkles and fruit sauce too. She's worse than grandpa's pigs, except she has manners at the table. But not by much." the brother sassed his sibling with a big smirk as the girl shrugged it off with a loud, friendly laugh.

After a few more funny barbs about siblings' eating habits and (lacking) manners, the young adult woman asked in simple curiosity "So, what are you guys doing out this late? And why the hardware? Our grand-parents hadn't warned us the bears were coming into town these days." As her mother had taught her, sometimes a point of humor can get you information freely where doubts and accusations would close the doors in your face quite harshly.

Lucas gesture vaguely with his free hand as he ate his dessert. "I am celebrating my birthday. Well, a
day early. It's a habit I took at a young age. I was born on the 24th December passed 23:50pm in the night, so trying to find a decent restaurant that is either open or not full on that day, and in the evening for a slow dinner, isn't happening any time soon. Christmas always makes people close early or have packed rooms, so I got stuck having my little 'Me' time a day early, and sometimes earlier. Otherwise, it's simply my first real visit to this town in years, since the first time was a messy whirlwind of crooked lawyers and incompetent accountants. Hopefully, I'll be able to clean it up, this time around.

Shrugging it off as just the life he had lived, Lucas had trouble recognizing the weird expressions on the young people's faces for the natural incomprehension that it was, nor what caused it. His deplorable youth and cruel family life weren't normal, he knew that even without his training in medicine. But, he had gotten so little help, so he wasn't always able to realize it was feelings of interrogation, surprise, pity or disgust that 'normal' humans felt when they learned details about his childhood. Of course, he actively tried to forget many of these gory details, and wasn't prone to hashing them out loud, so he might have developed a bit of a blind spot concerning that subject, and the emotions they suscitate in others.

"So, lawyers and accountants enough to make a problem." queried carefully the 23 year old male, trying to get a feel of just how bad this could go if his younger siblings said something that was just too 'young' or 'stupid' for the tastes of the men with guns and knives. Or their boss. That one was a nightmare; a kid the same age as his brother but so rich that adult men took orders from him, up to carrying weapons of war. He was beginning to think they should have braved the snowed-out roads right up to the farm, not stop in town despite the pressing needs. "That must be a helluva wad o' cash to have that many problems all at once. Could it have anything to do with the old wheeled saloon in the parking lot, next to the green jeep? I'm guessing antique car, old money with old relatives trying to shaft you out of your inheritance, or something like it..."

The butler and driver winced at the rather gauchely asked questions, while the four soldiers exchanged looks but kept quiet and peaceful; they didn't know their boss yet, but he hadn't given them the feel of a guy who swings at kids for asking questions of mundane curiosity. That, and they had their own questions too, but protocols and internal regs meant they couldn't have the answers openly. By accident, if they overheard the conversation, that was another thing.

Lucas shrugged nonchalantly, swirling warm tea in his cup as he peacefully digested the miniature coffee, toffee and vanilla yule log he had chosen for dessert. Taking a slow sip of tea, he waved vaguely with his right hand at the older male, which could be interpreted as confirmation or many other things.

"It's family troubles spread out over nearly 120 years, and several countries. My ancestors' little gift for my 16th birthday. Quite nice of them. And it doesn't have a refund policy, either, since the store shut down after World War II was done. Bah... I'll just hire more people to process the paperwork, and it'll get done anyways in due time."

"So, you really are the boss of these guys?" the eldest brother asked for confirmation. Lucas wasn't able to figure out what his stress was about, but he was obviously anxious and feeling under immediate threat for himself and the younger siblings.

"I am." the genius adolescent replied crisply, changing tone and posture to show he was more awake and paying attention to whatever problem the other man had to speak of. "These six are my employees, through their contracts with Wise Apothecary & Chemists, of which I am the lawful inheritor, proprietor, operator and sole beneficiary. By virtue of this, I am also the Constable – Governor of the North-American Mid-Line, tasked with protecting the border crossing in times of natural catastrophe or warfare. These soldiers are part of the WAC security troops, as mandated by
our contracts with Canada and the USA, and these are servants of my household retinue. I am Lucas, doctor Wolenczak, Lord Wise, Protector of this Land. How may I serve?” he spoke in the clear-cut, sharp words that he used when dealing with politicians and military deciders who answered only to Strength, Power and money.

Raphael Chadderton injected quickly "He has earned three doctorates in medicine from Stanford before age 15, plus many other diplomas and plaudits. He's a real doctor in research pharmacology, psychiatric neurology, and history & laws of medical practice in North America. He has a mixed bag of master's degrees, certificates and licenses that I can't keep straight, and enough patents to his name to be rated next to Tesla, Edison and Einstein. So yes; he's the boss of WAC, our employer, and no, the soldiers aren't a threat to your family. They only deploy to protect assets and personnel of WAC when necessary, otherwise we trust the Canadian police forces to do an honest job of it. And for the record, this young man shouldn't be the one you're worried about. There are far more unstable, criminally depraved bastards lurking outside than him, especially since the US prison and psych hospitals have collapsed. The guards fled or got killed, so the inmates are loose in the streets, and some are trying to find either shelter or easy prey."

Lenny snorted with malicious glee as the waiter refilled his coffee cup. "Morons! I wish them luck! Trying to find anything in this damned white shite that's falling on us! And the temperatures are gonna fall even worse. When I went to the bathroom, they had the news station playing in the speakers, and the weather people predict a damned Polar Vortex sweeping across all of North America for the next three to six days, with a half-foot of snow in most of the USA and Canada's inhabited section. If any idiot escapee from a jail is outside, or even in an abandoned structure, they'll freeze to death and be found in the spring thaw. That's if anybody bothers to look."

Taking a long pull of his piping hot drink, the old driver said "You'd better put yar efforts into looking after your own skins, than fearing for threats that can't reach you up here. And be smart about it! You need a dry shelter, food, and fuel to burn. Anything else is either a bonus or a hindrance that'll kill you quick. Think 'bout that with yar gramps, when ya reach 'em."

Thinking about something, Lucas signaled the restaurant's majordomo to come by so he could ask his question. "We were speaking of emergencies and assistance. Have the police, firemen or paramedics in town issued any sorts of public notices or advise on how to go about your lives, and jobs, in these trying times? Are there new business rules or circulation laws? Other than the call for martial law and rationing of essential materials two days ago, I haven't heard anything else."

The woman shook her head despondently as she answered "Nothing on our end, either. You'd think the government would move faster, given how up & about they usually are about Peace, Order and Good Governance. We thought they'd put in better efforts at insuring we wouldn't have any lawlessness or a sudden explosion of criminality, but I guess they're concentrating on the big cities like Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver, and the like. Small towns like ours aren't usually the problem child in the household, if you get my meaning." Despite the calm demeanor and brave smile, it was obvious she was putting up a front that she didn't believe in.

"Well, that tells me how I'll be spending my christmas day." Lucas mumbled darkly. "Raphael, I'm going to need to see the WAC security department tomorrow morning. We need to start stepping up to the situation if the constabulary can't or won't. I also need to see for myself the recruits and training for the militia I ordered we start boosting. We may need to institute patrols and guard posts around the town perimeter to guarantee peace for the citizens. I'm the C-G, it's time I did the full job."

As the convoy group left the restaurant for their return trip to the manor, the teenager was too busy inside his own mind with planning the coming steps to see the new hope that was blossoming inside the people who had met him. Though accidental, this meeting would be determinant in the coming future.
In the evening of the 23rd of December 2020, Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, is laying the legal foundations and opening moves to wage war against Lucas and the WAC’s conglomerate which he sees as enemies of his country. The lengthy story behind that enmity is explored, as is the main group that Trudeau will rely on to legitimize his open acts of warfare against his temporary ally.

In Los Angeles, NCIS and DXS begin to establish permanent links with the new Constable – Governor in order to try to stop the civil wars so that national reconstruction can begin. Obviously, it doesn’t work out the way they want.

The SeaQuest & convoy begin their slow progress northwards inside The Great Eastern Split as the UEO executive committee convenes a video-meeting that nobody wants to have.

Lucas, still reeling from all the informations and political maneuvering surrounding his new position and title, gets a nasty wake-up call, right in the middle of his own property. Several people are about to see just how little patience for violence against his person the young man has left.

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