

Tipping Point

(A tale of the Second U.S. Civil War)

by Frank Clarke

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There will be civil war in this country before there is meaningful civilian disarmament. Some days, talking to the anti-gun loons, I feel like I'm standing with a crowd of eight-year-olds, ankle deep in gasoline, trying to keep them from playing with matches.

-- Unknown (via Jeffrey C. Dege)

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I take full responsibility for whatever faults remain.

1 - An Incident In Dennison, Texas

Rain pelted against the windows in the way only Texas rain can pelt. Terry Edmonds stared at it, fascinated, unable to tear his eyes away, so the eraser came as quite a surprise. It arrived in a high arching curve, hit his desk squarely, pad down in a cloud of chalk dust and bounced once, hitting him on the ear. The class erupted in gales of laughter loud enough to drown out the rain.

"Ah, good," Mr. Kane remarked, "you're back with us again. I thought we had lost you for a moment there. Now that you're back from wherever you were, would you be good enough to answer the question?"

"I... I... I'm sorry..." Terry stammered.

"You certainly are sorry," Mr. Kane interrupted him. "You're the sorriest student I've ever had the misfortune to try to teach. You don't study, you don't do your homework, you don't pay attention in class, and your test scores show it. About the only good thing I can say is that you keep your seat nice and warm, and you don't slow the rest of the class down with stupid questions... or any questions, really."

A scowl crossed Terry's face. This wasn't the first tongue-lashing he'd gotten from Mr. Kane, but it sure as hell was going to be the last. He reached down to pick up the fallen eraser.

"Get out," Mr. Kane ordered. "Go find a class where you can sleep all day. I don't want you taking up space in mine." Harry Kane's left arm extended to a finger pointing toward the classroom door.

Terry grabbed his backpack and flung it over his left shoulder, cocked his Texas Student Athletic Association award-winning pitcher's arm and sent the eraser straight at his teacher's forehead. The little block of felt and paper hit Harry Kane square in the center of his head with not so much force as could knock him off his feet. Surprise did that. By the time he realized what had transpired, all he could see was the door softly closing behind a departing Terry Edmonds. His class was a sea of silent, gaping mouths.

"Good riddance," he opined.

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Terry had tried, he really had (he told himself). Mr. Kane just had it in for him, *why* he could not fathom. He was going to fail this course, that was a certainty, and failing this required subject meant he

would become ineligible for the remainder of the season. *Life*, he thought, *really sucked*.

The fire doors burst outward under the impact of both of his outthrust arms, and he continued without missing a step toward the parking lot. He started his scooter and was flying toward the exit a moment later.

Wind whistled through his hair as he headed for home. Plans vaguely coalesced in his benumbed brain. The face of Mr. Kane continually popped to the front of his thoughts like a toothache. Even as he entered the house, he did not yet realize what it was he had planned. The thoughts did not really rise to the surface even as he took the plastic case from his father's nightstand. The little brass padlock surrendered with just a single twist of a good screwdriver. The 9mm Beretta inside had three high-capacity magazines, all loaded with hollow point bullets, perfect for people. He slipped a magazine into the handle and racked a round into the chamber, pocketed the other two magazines and tucked the Beretta into his belt.

He knew that he must not use the regular entrances, all of which had metal detectors. Instead, he went in through the gymnasium and from there into the main building, up to the second floor through halls empty of activity, past class after class of serious students scribbling notes furiously. He paused only momentarily before the door of room 217, but the part of his brain that had been screaming "*No*" for the past fourteen minutes could no longer be heard above the roar that screamed "*Kill!*" His left hand twisted the doorknob and pushed. He stepped inside.

Harry Kane turned slowly, methodically, to see who dared disturb his lesson plan.

"I told you not to come back," he reminded Terry.

In one smooth motion, Terry's hand went to his belt, the fingers wrapping around the grip and pulling as his thumb flicked the safety off. As his father, Police Chief Mark Edmonds, had taught him, he aimed for the center of mass, Harry Kane's chest, and fired. Once. Twice.

Harry Kane crumpled to the floor, blood fountaining from his chest. Girls screamed in terror. Two boys near the front of the room stood and lunged for Terry, but they never had a chance. He dropped them both before they had gotten clear of their chairs. His eyes searched the room until they were looking straight into Theresa Corman's. She wasn't screaming as were most of the others, and she hadn't run for cover. Instead, she sat rigidly in her chair staring back at Terry Edmonds. Tears streamed down her face, partly tears of sadness, and partly tears of fear. Terry walked down the aisle to where Theresa sat, pointed the muzzle at her head, and squeezed off

one more round. Most of the students now ran panic-stricken for the doorway. He let them go. He didn't care about most of them. He had other fish to fry.

In room 231, most of the students were still huddled under their desks. A few had jammed their desks under the doorknob to prevent anyone entering, but the bullets that smashed the lockset off the door made their efforts wasted. He was inside room 231, and he still had most of the first magazine waiting.

Mrs. Davis waved her arms in front of her imploringly. "Terry, don't do this," she begged, but he shot her anyway, and then he shot seven more students before moving on down the hall.

As he walked, a figure emerged from the stairwell: Officer Watson, the school resource officer, and he had his service weapon at the ready. Terry took cover behind a locker and emptied the remainder of the magazine into Watson's chest. Then he picked up the policeman's Glock and pocketed it, continuing down the stairs to the first floor.

The school had taken on an eerie quietness, the sort of quiet you would expect on a weekend morning: no voices, no footsteps except his own, and no sounds except a faint crying sound emanating from where he could not tell.

The Principal's office door was locked. He shot the lock off with Watson's .40 caliber Glock and kicked the door inward. A short scream told him the people he wanted to see were still there. The Principal and her staff had moved, all of them, into a back room and locked that door as well. When Terry shot its lock off and kicked that door in, he discovered the room in total darkness. It had no windows, and the light had been deliberately broken to deny him visibility. Terry was crazy, perhaps, but he wasn't stupid. He wasn't going into that room unable to see. He was here to kill, not to be killed, and he wasn't finished. He emptied the Glock into the darkened room, aiming low to catch anything crouching under tables or behind desks. Then he emptied another 9mm magazine as well before leaving.

As he exited the front door of the Principal's office, he could see the first police cars, lights flashing, sirens blaring, entering the parking lot. Calmly, he walked down the hall toward the auditorium and climbed the stairs into the balcony. From the rear windows of the projection booth he could see the main hallway in both directions for its full length. Perfect. He took one bullet from the last full magazine, inserted it into one of the empty magazines and slipped that into his shirt pocket.

The police who were now fanning out across his school would not, like Watson, be unprotected. These would be wearing body

armor, and they would be carrying AR-15s. Terry would have to be very careful.

But maybe not too careful. From the west end of the main hallway, a lone teacher herded his clutch of eighth-graders to what he thought was safety: to the auditorium and out onto the playing fields where, if disaster struck, they could each run in different directions.

Terry leaned out the window and began firing. The bullets that did not initially find targets ricocheted off the marble floors and found a target on the way back up — at least most of them did, anyway. In an instant, the screaming children were moving in every possible direction, and Terry could no longer get a decent bead on any of them. He turned to look down the hall just in time to see a shooter go down on one knee, his AR-15 on his cheek.

Terry pulled his head in just in time to avoid a volley of bullets, switched hands, leaned back out and returned fire. The rifleman, not expecting such a quick return, had failed to take cover and paid for the error with his life as a hollow-point 9mm bullet smashed through his right eye and out the back of his skull.

Inside the projection room, Terry looked at the Beretta. Its slide was now locked back, indicating an empty magazine. He ejected that magazine and inserted the magazine he had stored in his shirt pocket. The slide slammed forward, chambering his one remaining round. He put the muzzle underneath his chin and pulled the trigger.

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Officer Matt Creal whipped around the corner of the Principal's office, his AR-15 aimed at the darkened doorway of the storage room, ready to shoot anything that looked dangerous. Assistant Principal Anna Burrel saw his blue uniform and badge and stepped into the doorway, a big smile of relief on her face. Before she could open her mouth to tell him how happy she was to be rescued, Creal had put four bullets into her chest.

"Don't shoot!" the others cried out from the darkness, "We're unarmed."

Creal turned to the wall and puked his breakfast.

"Come out one at a time," his backup told them, and bloodstained bodies began appearing in the doorway. Several of them had been wounded, and one had been killed by the random shots Terry had fired into the darkened room. Each of them gingerly stepped across the supine body of Anna Burrel carefully avoiding stepping into the expanding pool of blood seeping from beneath her dress. A fellow officer helped Matt Creal out to the command post.

This was not going to be an easy error to explain, and Creal wondered if his days as a law enforcement officer were over.

Ambulances lined up outside the school waiting for the "all clear" that would be their signal to help the wounded and bag the dead. Outside the second-floor projection room of the auditorium, four officers clustered in defensive positions while another two covered their backs. One officer rushed forward and kicked at the door's lock mechanism. It popped, and the door swung open as he dived sideward for cover. As the door swung they could each see there was no more need for caution. Blood streamed down Terry Edmonds' face and neck, staining his tee shirt and jeans and beginning to collect on the floor. The wall behind him was covered in blood in a spatter pattern all the officers recognized.

"Shooter is down," the team leader spoke into his radio handset. The staff in the Principal's office had already identified the shooter as Terrence Edmonds, and others had each repeated that same name and no other, so the police were fairly confident that there had been a single gunman, and that gunman was now confirmed "dead".

At the command post Terry's father, the Chief of Police, buried his face in his hands and wept. As he tried to understand what had just happened, a black limousine with a police escort turned into the school's parking lot. Deputy Chief Strauss moved to head off the Mayor before he could begin harassing the Chief. The two moved to the side to talk quietly and privately, and Strauss filled the Mayor in on the details.

"That's fine," the Mayor assured him, "I see you have the situation under control. I'm more interested now in my daughter. I've got to go find her."

"I can't let you go in there, Mr. Mayor," Strauss insisted. "We think there was only one shooter, but we can't be sure until our teams have gone through the school and made sure it's secure. You may be my boss, but I would be derelict in my duty to the city if I allowed you inside a potentially dangerous crime scene. I'll check with the office and try to locate her for you. Just wait here." Strauss called a subordinate over and gave him the assignment to find the Mayor's daughter.

Inside room 217 the paramedics found Harry Kane lying on his back in a pool of blood. They didn't even need to check for a pulse. That kind of blood-loss is incompatible with life. Nearby were two boys in contorted positions. Each had been shot once in the chest, and both were dead. The only other casualty in the room was a female still

sitting in her chair with her head lolled back and her face covered in blood. The back of her skull was missing.

"Is this who I think it is?" one asked the other.

"God, I hope not." They found her purse in the cubbyhole beneath the seat, opened her wallet and flipped through her ID.

"Somebody's got to tell the Mayor."

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"Once again our nation mourns," the President intoned. "Once again we hear the wailing of parents, friends, and relatives asking 'Why?', and once again we have no answer for them. Tell me what I should say to them," he demanded of the Joint Session of the Congress of the United States. "Tell me what I should say so that this President can finally give them an answer, however frail or overdue."

It was a rhetorical question. He didn't expect and didn't want an answer. The glare of the lights required by the television cameras were drawing noticeable beads of perspiration on his brow. Rather than make him look nervous, they added a luster of sorts to his normally sallow complexion.

"I'll tell you what answer we should give them... what answer we must give them: we must tell them that this will never be permitted to happen again. We must tell them that their sons and their daughters are the last — they are the last to die needlessly at the hands of a madman with a gun. We must tell them that this administration, this President and this Congress are going to put an end to the insanity that has gripped our nation for so long.

"I ask you tonight... no, I demand of you tonight that you begin immediately to craft effective legislation at the Federal level that will eliminate firearms as a method of mass murder. I tell you tonight that we now have hard evidence that the Second Amendment has not simply outlived its usefulness, but has become a positive danger to the peace and security of our nation, and it must go." He looked at the Press Corps. "It must go." He looked at the Senators. "It must go." He looked at the Representatives. "It must go. Tonight you must fulfill your duty to your nation and its citizens by beginning to dismantle the archaeological remnants of our nation's violent past so that our people can march confidently into the bright future that is the birthright of all men of good will. Thank you."

The hall erupted in thunderous applause as senators and representatives alike rose from their seats in a standing ovation. The President turned to shake the hands of the Speaker and his Vice President while applause continued around him.

In the remote TV studios, the talking heads began their analysis of the President's remarks:

"For the first time in America's history, a President has seriously suggested altering the Bill of Rights, and it is not surprising, in the wake of this week's multiple shooting at the quiet, rural, upscale Hallance Consolidated School in Dennison, Texas, that the subject of that alteration is the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms. The Second Amendment has been the topic of bitter debates for over fifty years beginning with the assassination in the early 60s of President Kennedy. An ever-tightening noose of legislation has been drawn around it since then in a seemingly vain effort to bring gun violence under control, but each year seems to bring another in a long series of senseless tragedies and grisly murders, often bearing the tell-tale marks of class warfare with society's outcasts usually the perpetrators.

"This time, however, it was not one of society's outcasts, but the teenage son of Dennison's Chief of Police who, after shooting two of his teachers, many of his fellow students, and several administrators, according to eyewitnesses, calmly, coldly, and calculatingly assassinated the mayor's daughter, one of his own classmates, before turning the gun on himself in a final gruesome act of self-immolation.

"Oddly, sentiment in Dennison, Texas is not that society has a problem, but that one boy, ignored long enough, can bring tragedy to an entire town. Nevertheless, throughout the nation the call for action to prevent a recurrence has been loud, widespread, and sustained, and tonight, the President seems to be reacting to that call. Whether Congress will heed it as well remains to be seen. There is, in opposition, a deep-rooted sentiment that the Bill of Rights must not be tampered with, especially as a reaction to what many see as a local and not very prevalent aberration.

"Many Senators, representing the bulk of the Northeastern states, have already expressed their opinion that, as the President said tonight, the Second Amendment has outlived its usefulness.

"Congressional leaders have promised the President's remarks will top tomorrow's agenda in both houses."

2 - A Firebell In The Night

The speaker's gavel banged continually until the hall became quiet.

"The chair recognizes the Honorable Gentleman from New York."

All eyes turned toward the New York delegation as a lone figure rose. Adjusting his glasses, he picked a sheet of paper from the desk in front of him and began to read.

"The people of the State of New York have long been intolerant of firearms, having some of the strictest licensing provisions in all of the United States. It is our opinion, speaking for my constituents, that had the other states enacted regulations as strict, we would not now be discussing the repeal of the Second Amendment. And if there were some possibility that all of our sister states might exercise the same level of caution, I would have no qualms, not one, about keeping the right to keep and bear arms.

"That, however, is not the case. Time has shown us that as long as the Constitution allows it, someone somewhere in some state whose lax firearms laws make it possible will arm the criminal element, and these criminals will take their guns into all the other states. No, it is time to solve this problem once and for all. This is the place to solve the problem. Today is the day we say to the merchants of death: 'No more! Leave our children in peace!'

"The State of New York wishes to go on record as the first to call for the repeal of the Second Amendment."

A smattering of applause rippled through the chamber. The Speaker's gavel rapped a few more times until quiet returned.

"Would the Honorable Gentleman from New York care to cast that as a formal motion?" the Speaker prompted.

"The State of New York moves the repeal of the Second Amendment."

"Is there a 'second'?" the Speaker asked.

"The State of New Jersey seconds the motion."

The representative from Texas rose to address the House.

"Texans know that one of the worst things that can happen to a cowpoke on the trail is a stampede," Clay Turner cautioned them. "Them critters get a crazy notion in their head and take off a-runnin', and anything that gets in their way, they just trample, and by the time

the cowboys get the herd stopped and under control, they've done a lot of damage and gone a long way off their path.

"Well, it looks like the worst thing that can happen to a Congress also happens to be a stampede. Congresscritters from upscale, affluent, gated communities where crime is just a five-letter word, get some crazy notion in their heads —" The speaker's gavel rapped once. The representative from Texas turned to look at her.

"The gentleman from Texas is reminded of the rules of decorum in this chamber," she chided him.

"It's important," Turner continued, "that we not trample stuff we want to keep in our rush to appear to be doing something. It's worth noting that the good people of Texas, for the most part, do not consider guns to be a problem, the actions of one or two disturbed teenagers notwithstanding. You do not honor them by your actions here today.

"To the honorable gentleman from New York, I wish to point out that all the restrictions on gun-ownership in the world would not have had the slightest impact on the events of November 12th. The gun that was used to slay students and teachers that day was a police officer's firearm, and no one — not a single person here in this room — is ready to suggest we disarm our police, because you all want to be re-elected." The speaker's gavel rapped again. Clay Turner looked up at the speaker's chair.

"I'm finished, Madam Speaker," he told her.

"Indeed you are, Congressman," she replied, glaring at him.

Percy Edmonds (R-VT) approached the lectern and adjusted his glasses.

"In the mid-nineties, we Republicans came into possession of both houses of Congress because of something called 'The Contract With America'. I stand here this afternoon to tell you that there is, and always has been, since the inception of this country, a 'Contract With America'. That contract is called 'The Bill of Rights'. There would not have been a Constitution — not enough states would have ratified it — had there not also been a Bill of Rights. Those ten articles are the price the rest of the nation paid to induce enough states to join in this compact, to induce them to create The United States of America.

"Now, some here are suggesting that we should abrogate that agreement. 'It's out-of-date', they say. 'It's too dangerous', they say. Hear, now, what Vermont has to say: if you touch the Bill of Rights, you break the compact. Those of you who are willing to live under a foreshortened guarantee of freedom may go your own way. Those of us who will not will go our own way.

"You may call that 'secession' if you wish. We Vermonters see it this way: you will have thrown us out of your so-called 'union'. Vermont will have no part in this."

He gathered his notes and returned to his seat. There was not a single sound in the chamber. Everyone understood that they were watching the dissolution of the United States of America.

The representative from Wyoming rose when his turn came.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"Honorable Brethren, do we not all recognize these fundamental rights our founding fathers called 'unalienable'? 'Endowed by their creator with the right to life.' Is there anyone here who disputes that? Let him rise to defend the assertion that the right does not exist.

"And if we have the right to life, do we not also have the right to defend that life, and is that right to self-defense not equally unalienable? If there be anyone here who disputes that, let him rise to defend the assertion that the right does not exist.

"And if we have the right to self-defense and are denied the means to implement that right, of what use is the right to self-defense or that which it supports, the right to life?

"Take away the means of defending one's life and you deny the fundamental right to life itself. And make no mistake, that is exactly what is being proposed... what has been proposed here. Some will say that there are other ways to defend a life, but for the mass of our citizens who do not have the luxury of training for months or years in the martial arts and who, even then, would be disadvantaged when faced with an armed criminal, the matter before this body would truly strip them of the most fundamental mark of the free man.

"Wyoming will not be a party to this. If the second amendment or any part of the Bill of Rights is repealed, Wyoming will leave the Union. Don't dare call it 'secession'. We will have been ejected from your Union."

3 - End Run

For the past forty minutes, cars had been arriving at the home of Senator Kingsley (D-WY), and their occupants, in ones and twos, had entered the house. In an ordinary neighborhood one might have thought the Kingsleys were hosting a party, but on "Bureaucrats Row", as the few non-government residents called it, it was just as easily a cabal. And this was no party. The serious looks on the faces of the attendees was enough to confirm that.

"I suppose it's no secret why we're all here," Senator Kingsley began when they had all assembled, "but let's state it for the record.

"We, all of us, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike, represent the states that are opposed to repeal of the second amendment. I have spoken to each of you individually over the past four days, and each of you has expressed your devotion to the second amendment in terms that make me confident that we are of one mind on this issue, if no others. We are, because of that, a *de facto* caucus on that issue, and I propose that we formalize that relationship, offering each other our hands in a gentleman's agreement to work together, to keep faith with each other in the battle that surely lies ahead, for only by each of us keeping careful watch and making sure the others have the benefit of our eyes and ears will we have any hope of saving the people's right to keep and bear arms."

He extended his hand to the Republican Senator from Texas amid a chorus of "Hear! Hear!" and they shook hands. This was repeated all around the room until everyone, it seemed, had had the opportunity of meeting, some for the first time, colleagues from across the aisle. When the hubbub had mostly died down, Senator Mortimer (D-SC) took Kingsley aside to whisper into his ear.

"Harry," he told Senator Kingsley in a confidential tone, "I don't know that I'm going to be much help. My mail on this topic is running six-to-one against. My partner, even though he's a Republican, is probably getting the same barrage of mail from the 'Brady' folks. I don't think you should count on South Carolina's support although you know you'll always have mine."

"Well, Nelson, that's pretty bad news for us, as you probably know. That brings us down to thirty-three Senators opposed and gives the repealers the sixty-seven percent they need to make this a done deal. I don't suppose you're willing to stop a bullet for us on this one, are you?"

Nelson Mortimer shook his head. "I don't see what good it would do. The other South Carolina vote is probably committed to repeal, and that's sixty-seven percent right there. My one vote won't buy you anything, and it will surely cost me my seat at election-time."

"That's that, then. We better tell the others." He turned to the crowd and raised his voice to be heard over the din of conversation. "Gentlemen... gentlemen... may I have your attention. I have an announcement to make." The room quieted noticeably. "I have some bad news. Our good friend, Senator Mortimer, has just told me that he is unable to publicly support our effort to fend off repeal. For those of you who are keeping count, that leaves just thirty-three Senators in our camp and that spells very bad news: we now have insufficient votes in the Senate to prevent a repeal resolution. I'm afraid our efforts here tonight are for naught."

The senior senator from Colorado spoke first: "Gentlemen, we may still have cards to play, and I think we should not so easily surrender this historic bi-partisan effort. I do suggest, however, that if the Senator from South Carolina believes himself compromised, we should release him with our thanks and continue our counsel without him."

Senator Mortimer shook hands again with Kingsley and then with the senators from Texas and finally with the Colorado delegation before moving to the door, out, and homeward.

Inside the Kingsley house, discussion continued.

"Vermont's not here. Why isn't Vermont here? They were always pro-second-amendment. Can we count on them?"

"Yes, we can probably count on them regardless, but that still leaves us one vote short. We might accidentally pick up another vote, but all we need is a little more pressure from the anti-gun lobby (and you can be sure we're going to get it) and we're sunk. We need some ideas to give us more than just another state or two."

The junior senator from Montana had been jotting notes on a piece of paper and chimed in. "I think I can give us four more."

"Four more? How?"

"I just remembered something someone had told me about Texas many years ago." The senators from Texas turned so as to be able to hear every word.

"The annexation agreement between the Republic of Texas and the United States of America allows Texas to unilaterally split itself into five districts, each of which must be admitted to the Union as states. If Texas is so inclined, it can create four more states and cause this vote to be made on the basis of fifty-four states rather than fifty. Two-thirds of fifty-four is thirty-six and the repealers will be two to three states short. Of course that only means that a repeal

resolution won't happen in Congress. The states may still call a convention and take it out of our hands."

Kingsley turned to the senior Senator from Texas, Roberto Martinez, with a quizzical look. "Is that true, Roberto?"

"Technically, yes," Martinez responded. "I raised the issue with my counterparts earlier in the week, but they aren't as confident as our young colleague from Montana. The crux of the matter is a small difference of opinion called *'the American Civil War'*. Texas, you may recall, was on the losing side in that conflict, the result of which was that all the states became vassals of the federal government. There is some sentiment — not in Texas, of course — that the American Civil War may have abrogated all prior annexation agreements, which would mean that the inducements to annex given to Texas in 1845 are now nothing more than interesting words on an historical document. There is a fair bit of doubt that we could get away with it at all."

"Who would make the decision?" Kingsley asked.

"That would be the Texas legislature, with the approval of the Governor," Martinez answered.

"How likely is that?" Bostock, the junior senator from Montana pressed.

"Dunno," Martinez offered. He flipped his cell phone open and started dialing a number, apparently from memory.

"Don?" he inquired after a few moments. "Roberto Martinez. Don, I need to get your take on an issue a few of us are discussing here in DC. Texas' annexation agreement allows the state to subdivide into five parts that would all become states automatically. Are you aware of that?"

"Sure, Roberto," Don Hearn assured him. "Every Texas middle-schooler knows that — I hope." Don had been a teacher before running for the Texas legislature. "Is someone thinking that it's time for Texas to have ten senators? You know, the conventional wisdom on that is that none of them would ever vote on the same side of an issue."

Don and Roberto each took a few seconds to chuckle over the fierce independence Texans held on every issue. "Actually, Don," Roberto continued, "and this is extremely confidential, I've called to ask you if it's possible to make that happen."

Don Hearn, speaker of the Texas House, was caught very off-guard by Roberto's admission. His mind started mulling a hundred possibilities.

"Don—?" Roberto prodded.

"I'm thinking" Don pushed back. "How soon were you thinking this needs to happen?"

"Don, it needs to happen tomorrow," Roberto informed him solemnly.

"There's been a contingency plan passed down from speaker-to-speaker over the past... oh, hundred-forty, hundred-fifty years or so, covering just this eventuality. There's probably a similar plan for the Senate, although I don't have any knowledge of that. Let me make a few calls and get back to you."

"Can you get back to me tonight?" Roberto pleaded.

"I'll be back to you in an hour," Hearn assured him, "even if it's to tell you 'I don't know'." They both hung up.

Don Hearn called Maria delaGarza, the single most powerful person in the Texas Senate. She answered on the first ring. 'Caller-ID' is a powerful tool.

"delaGarza," she answered. "What's up, Don?"

"Maria," Hearn greeted her, "are you alone?"

"For the moment," she lied.

"I have something very confidential to discuss with you. Can we agree that this conversation is privileged communication?"

Maria delaGarza put her hand over the mouthpiece and dismissed the people who were with her in the room. In a few seconds, she resumed speaking: "This is a first for me, Don: the leader of the opposition getting ready to tell me things I probably shouldn't hear. I'm all ears."

"Maria, I just got off the phone with Roberto Martinez. Roberto wants to know if Texas is prepared to... have you ever heard of George Robertson Reeves?"

"Don, you're not serious, are you?" she asked, but the mention of the name of the man who had methodically worked out, one-hundred-forty-some-odd years ago, the steps Texas must take to become North Texas, West Texas, South Texas, East Texas, and Central Texas made her sure that Don Hearn was, indeed, serious. Dead serious.

"That's why this is privileged communication, Maria," Don continued. "Roberto sounded as if he were very serious about this, and I promised him I would give him a 'read' tonight on whether it was likely to happen. That's why I called you. If anyone knows why this could or could not happen, Maria, it's you. You know Roberto as well as I do. He wouldn't have asked if it weren't important."

"What's the feeling in the House?" she asked.

"Believe it or not, I've had three people approach me just today with concerns over the debate in the U.S. Congress. Universally, their position has been that there should be no manipulation of the Bill of Rights to achieve societal aims mostly

espoused by damnyankees. I think the Texas House is ready to implement the Reeves plan."

"Let me make a few calls and get back to you," she suggested.

"Whether it's good news or bad news, call Roberto direct. Do you have his cell phone number?"

She assured him that she did, and they disconnected. She then immediately dialed the Whip.

"To what do I owe this honor?" Mark Fuller, the minority Whip asked when Maria delaGarza had introduced herself.

"First," she warned him, "this is privileged. Are we agreed on that?"

Fuller suddenly became all-business. It was very unusual for the leader of the opposition to call one-on-one, and even more unusual for her to suggest that collegial secrecy was the order of the day. "Is it a scandal about to blow up?" he asked, afraid to hear the answer.

"Oh, it's worse than that, Mark," she chuckled. "We could be about to destroy 'Texas' as we know it. What do you know of *'the Reeves plan'*?"

"Not much," he admitted. "It's a framework for splitting Texas into five separate states. It's allowed by our annexation agreement. Is that what we're talking about?"

"It is," she confirmed, "and it was suggested by someone from your own party, Roberto Martinez. I've already spoken to Don Hearn — actually, he called me after being prodded by Roberto — and Don thinks the House is ready to split the state. I think I can speak for my side of the aisle. I'm trying to gauge the support on yours. What's your estimate?"

"Roberto is well-respected in the Texas Senate," Fuller mused, "and many of us have written IOUs to him as well. If Roberto were to ask, I think the Senate would go for it. What precipitated all this?"

"You haven't been following the news out of DC, have you, Mark?" she asked. "The 'keep the 2nd' faction is hanging on by a thread. I'm sure they're looking for a few extra Senators to vote 'no'. A five-part Texas could swing the balance for them."

"I didn't know the vote was that close, Maria. I thought there were fifteen or sixteen states solidly opposed to repeal. That ought to be decisive."

"Washington politics, Mark," Maria explained. "*Brady* is really turning the screws hard. This is, after all, what they've been after since the 80s. They smell blood in the water, and they're pretty well-funded... lots better-funded than GOA or JPFO, for instance. Several states have rolled over for them. NRA is largely ineffective. They've

spent so many years compromising on so many issues that they have no credibility left."

"Well," he sighed, "that's too bad. So, you're saying it's up to us?"

"Looks like," she confirmed. "So, what does it look like from your side?"

"I'm sure Roberto can swing as many votes as he needs if it comes down to a vote. Yeah, we're good."

"Well, then," Maria said, "I'm going to call Roberto and give him the good news. Mark, let's keep in touch, okay? We're both looking out for Texas' best interests. Our aims are the same. There's no reason we should be opponents just because our methods are different." She disconnected and immediately began dialing Roberto Martinez' cell phone. Not thirty-five minutes had passed since Roberto had spoken to Don Hearn. The chirp of his phone caught him slightly off-guard. He looked at the display. It said 'Texas', but it didn't have Don's name attached.

"Martinez," he answered the phone.

"Roberto! It's Maria delaGarza! How have you been, Roberto?"

"Maria! How nice to hear your voice again," he lied. When he had served in the Texas Senate, he did not get along very well with Senator delaGarza, a rising star of the state's Democratic Party.

"Ah, Roberto," she continued, "I bring you good news. Is that a surprise for you?"

"Maria, you know that it is. You've never yet brought me good news, but I'm looking forward to being surprised. Do, please, continue."

"I got a call tonight from Don Hearn, and we had a very nice chat. Then I called your state Whip, and we also had a very nice chat. Do you know what we chatted about, Roberto?"

"Ummm... What?" he teased, feigning ignorance.

"We discussed something called '*the Reeves plan*' that originated in the Texas House in 1879 when the effects of losing the Civil War were becoming very painful to Texans. Reeves' notes have always been passed from the outgoing House leadership to the incoming leadership since they were first penned. The Senate leadership has also passed a copy of Reeves' handwritten notes forward since the 1880s, and senior members of the Senate have always been aware of it, as you most certainly know, having been one of them. Anyway, the good news I have for you is that Don thinks the House will go for it. I've spoken to Mark Fuller on the same topic, and we both think the Texas Senate will buy in, especially if you were to

make a personal appeal to all those who owe you favors, if you catch my drift. You're a winner, Señor Martinez."

Martinez turned to the others gathered at Senator Kingsley's house and gave them a big 'thumbs-up' accompanied by a large grin. Karl Bostock was stunned. "They're going to do it?" he whispered incredulously.

"Maria, do you know when this is going to happen?" Martinez asked her.

"Don indicated to me that you had impressed him with some sense of urgency. I would guess he'll make the motion tomorrow morning. I plan to introduce a motion in the Senate at about the same time. Does that fit with your plans?"

"Thank you, Maria. Now I owe you one."

"Let's wait to see what kind of reception it will get," she cautioned. "There are still many anti-gun Democrats in the Texas Senate. If they figure it out, opposition will mount quickly."

"Okay," Roberto agreed. "Good luck." The line dropped.

4 - "Treason!" He Cried

Don Hearn handed a sheaf of papers to the Clerk of the House, leaned in, and whispered something inaudible to anyone more than a few feet distant. The Clerk nodded and placed the papers with others on his desk as Hearn returned to the Speaker's chair. After a few moments to let the House come to order on its own, Hearn rapped the gavel twice and rose.

"Honorable members, I beg the indulgence of the House to introduce a resolution." Hearn paused to allow objections, and, hearing none, continued: "The Republic of Texas was annexed to the United States of America on December 29th, 1845, pursuant to a joint resolution of the United States Congress of March 1st, 1845. That annexation resolution provided as follows (among other things):

"...New States, of convenient size, not exceeding four in number, in addition to said State of Texas, and having sufficient population, may hereafter, by the consent of said State, be formed out of the territory thereof, which shall be entitled to admission under the provisions of the federal constitution."

Pages began fanning out through the hall, dropping bound packages of documents one on each desk.

"I move the creation of the States of West Texas, North Texas, South Texas, East Texas, and Central Texas from the territory heretofore known as The Republic of Texas —" The hall erupted in noise, mostly applause but with an audible smattering of catcalls. "— and to appoint provisional governments for each to supervise elections and otherwise act to fulfill the will of the people in those districts. The documents before you outline the proposal for boundaries and capitals." He paused to let his words sink in and to foster the impression that all this was not well-planned in advance.

As if on cue, the Representative from District 76 in El Paso County rose, and without being recognized shouted for all the chamber to hear: "El Paso County seconds the motion."

"A motion has been made and seconded," Hearn announced, after having to bang his gavel several times to restore order. "Is there to be discussion?"

Several of the members either rose from their seats or raised their hands to be recognized, or both. Hearn carefully selected those members who had been briefed in the months and years prior and who

had been other than unalterably opposed to the plan. The result was speaker after speaker who praised the idea of giving the citizens of Texas five times the senatorial clout they would otherwise have had. Others praised the notion of providing the disparate parts of Texas with options not available to a single entity. No longer would Midland, Amarillo, and El Paso be subordinated to the political clout wielded by Houston, Dallas and Ft Worth.

To maintain the appearance of a balanced discussion, Hearn had to occasionally recognize a speaker who had not been party to the telephone tree that last night alerted many of the legislators to *'the necessity for staying true to Texas'*. After one hundred sixty minutes of almost constant discussion of the issue — so unbalanced that many who originally intended to speak against the motion eventually withdrew their objections — the representative from Corpus Christi called the question, and the vote on the motion sealed the fate of the State of Texas—as far as the House was concerned.

In the Senate, Maria delaGarza had her deputy introduce the motion so that she could better control the discussion to follow. The result, however, was not noticeably different: the lure of having ten Senators in the U S Congress had long fascinated Texas' leaders who thought about the issue. Those who hadn't thought about the issue found themselves outflanked and outgunned by a cabal that had identified early in their legislative careers those who would be receptive to the idea. All that was necessary was a trigger to bring all those of one mind together in a joint effort. New York's attempt to dismember the Bill of Rights was something Texans, by and large, simply would not permit. This was the perfect excuse. That it had been provided by a pack of damnyankee nitwits was simply icing on the cake.

By 3 PM, both houses having passed virtually identical bills, a conference committee was hastily assembled to resolve the nearly meaningless differences. The Senate bill had reserved the name 'Texas' to that portion of the State containing Austin and the House bill had called that area "Central Texas". To preserve the historical record, the Senate yielded on the point. Ten minutes before 5 PM, the bill authorizing the creation of five new states from what had earlier been simply 'Texas' was presented to the governor. The governor had not even had time to prepare an appropriate speech. He made a few innocuous comments and signed the bill into law. Texas, the 28th state, had taken the first step toward oblivion.

The debate in the halls of the U.S. Congress completely overshadowed the events taking place in Austin. A few of the more minor news services picked up the story and 'ran with it', but it barely registered as a blip on CNN's wall-to-wall coverage of the fight over

the Second Amendment. By the time CNN editors realized what had happened, activity in DC was winding down for the day. Until CNN took notice, Congressional staffers paid no heed. Most Congressmen went home that evening not yet aware that there were about to be fifty-four states before long.

Most.

Roberto Martinez knew what was happening and made sure he was the last one out of the chamber that day. Before leaving, he button-holed the clerk and made a bid for early recognition the following morning.

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Alice Jenks, who represented parts of New York's Nassau and Suffolk counties, plopped onto the couch in her Georgetown home, grabbed the remote, and turned the TV on. It was always tuned to MSNBC. As the voice came on she started listening, trying to catch up on anything newsworthy that might have happened thus far today.

"...an action that would produce the fifty-first through fifty-fourth states. For an in-depth analysis, we turn now to our associate in Austin, Texas: Brad Swanson."

The split-image widened to give Brad Swanson the entire screen as he began his report. "Dave," he addressed his counterpart at the studio, "House Speaker Don Hearn this morning introduced a resolution calling for splitting Texas into five parts, something allowed under the annexation agreement between the United States and the Republic of Texas. As you know, from April 1836, when it won its independence from Mexico, until the end of 1845, when it became the 28th state, Texas was an independent nation. As an inducement to join the Union, Texas was given several valuable 'perks'. Chief among these was the unique power to create four more states from its own territory. Today, Texas seems to have exercised that option. In the Texas Senate, a nearly-identical resolution was introduced by Mike Carmichael, closely-aligned to Democratic Majority Leader Maria delaGarza. It's pretty obvious in hindsight that somebody greased the skids under this one, Dave. By early afternoon, both houses had passed bills. Before the dinner bell rang, a conference committee had worked out any remaining kinks — by adjusting the Senate bill to fit the House bill — and the Senate confirmed the change. This all happened so fast Governor Bill Mitchum seems to have been caught almost completely by surprise, but the skid-greasing had certainly proceeded apace: Mitchum signed the bill at 5:15 PM, barely an hour ago. For the time being things are quiet in Austin — indeed, throughout Texas — but it's likely that supporters will be partying

tomorrow. It is a certainty that a motion to admit will be placed before Congress in the morning, putting the current discussion on the back-burner for the moment. How that will affect the deliberations currently in progress is a matter of some concern on Capitol Hill tonight, as this tilts the balance of power away from those who are trying to repeal the Second Amendment. Back to you, Dave."

Alice grabbed the phone and speed-dialed the senior representative from New York. His first words to her, even before she had announced herself, were: "I just heard."

"What are we going to do?" Alice asked.

"Block it, of course," he told her. "If we let them have four more states, we've lost. Keep your calendar clear tonight. I'm going to set up a meeting."

Harry Tunstall, head of the New York delegation, dialed his legislative aide's cell phone. It was picked up on the first ring.

"Are you following the action in Texas, Eve?" he asked.

"I'm 'way ahead of you, yes," Eve answered. "Your next question is: can they do that? When I heard it, that was my first question, so I hit the Web. That annexation agreement is a public document and easily accessible. Here's what it says:

'...the foregoing consent of Congress is given upon the following conditions, and with the following guarantees, to wit:... Third, New States, of convenient size, not exceeding four in number, in addition to said State of Texas, and having sufficient population, may hereafter, by the consent of said State, be formed out of the territory thereof, which shall be entitled to admission under the provisions of the federal constitution.'

"It goes on to limit any such states north of the Missouri Compromise Line to being free states, and those south of the line to being either free or slave as the citizens of those states decide. That's a dead-letter now, of course, but there's no denying the ability of Texas to split itself."

"The hell there isn't," Harry roared. "There was a little historical event called *'the Civil War'*, wasn't there? What about that?"

"There was such a thing, as I recall," Eve teased, "but I can't find anything related to Texas' readmission to the Union mentioning abrogating the original conditions of annexation. If the U.S. Congress didn't handle that issue in 1870, Texas can make a good case for it still being within their power to do and which the United States must recognize."

"Screw them," Harry muttered. "I'm not going to let them get away with it. We're going to the wall on this. Be at my place at eight tonight. We need to make plans."

"Don't look so glum," Harry tried to cheer up his delegation. "At the absolute worst, we'll delay admission until after 'repeal the second' is complete, and by then it won't matter — much."

Eve chimed in: "Preliminary poll results have us just squeaking by in Congress with this effort: we have 68 votes in the Senate. If we lose two votes, repeal fails. Things are better in the House: we have — probably — 296 votes and we only need 290. That's just to get it sent to the states for their action. There'll be another campaign in the states.

"There are 38 states we think are likely to repeal: the ones we consider firmly opposed are Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming. That leaves 38, and 38 is the minimum number needed to pull this off. That's based on having 50 state legislatures. If there are suddenly 54 state legislatures, the number grows to 41. Since all four of those new states will effectively be 'Texas', and therefore 'firmly opposed', we will still have 38 'likelies' and we might as well all go home and stop wasting our time."

"So," Harry continued, "it's absolutely imperative that we stop Texas from splitting until we've finished what we started here."

"How long will that be?" one of them asked.

"It will take at least a year," Harry admitted.

"Do you think Texas will allow this to drag on for that long?" the other asked.

"They won't have any choice," Harry said smugly. "Congress still gets to approve all new admissions, and we can take as long as we want — and we will."

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The following morning duplicate resolutions were introduced to both houses of Congress in Washington by their Texas delegations. Each had dozens of co-sponsors, so the Texans were very disappointed that the bills were not scheduled to be heard immediately. They became infuriated when they found the bills had been referred to the Rules committees, headed by Congressmen from New Jersey and Massachusetts. It was very likely the House would not debate the matter during this session, possibly never.

Clay Turner rose and shouted for all the hall to hear: "Point of order, Madam Speaker." The Speaker ignored him and pressed on

with other business. The lone Representative from Montana rose and shouted: "Point of order, Madam Speaker." He was followed in turn by Vermont, Arizona, and Utah each demanding attention to a point-of-order. Eventually, the Speaker relented and recognized Utah.

The delegate from Utah stood and declared: "The Honorable Mr. Turner of Texas first raised his point of order. Utah yields the floor to Mr. Turner of Texas so that he may make his point."

Clay Turner advanced to the lectern and addressed the House. "The admission of new states is a specified duty of the Congress in Article 4, section 3 of the Constitution. Referring such a task to a subcommittee constitutes 'shirking its duty' and violates both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. The State of Texas demands this Congress carry out its duty. The State of Texas demands —" The Speaker's gavel rapped twice. Turner continued. "The State of Texas demands HB.1711 be brought to the floor —" The gavel rapped three more times. "— for debate and a vote of the full House."

"Mr. Turner," the Speaker angrily addressed him, "you are out of order. Return to your seat."

"No, Madam Speaker," Turner shot back equally as angrily, "I will not yield. I will be heard, and the voice of the Republic of Texas and its people will be heard." That he had switched from referring to Texas as 'The State of...' and had now resumed using its formal designation, 'The Republic of...' was not lost on the House.

"Mr. Turner," the Speaker said standing at her desk and looking down at him, "you are out of order. Bills will come before this House on a schedule determined by the duly appointed committees, and not a moment sooner. Mr. Turner, return to your seat or I will order the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort you from the chamber."

"Call the Sergeant," Turner dared her. The Speaker motioned to the Sergeant-at-Arms and three uniformed men came forward to confront Clay Turner. As they led him from the chamber, the Representative from Utah rose to be recognized. The Speaker ignored him. He called out: "Madam Speaker!" but there was no response. The Representative from Vermont rose and called out: "Madam Speaker!" and he, too, was ignored. When the Representatives from Montana and Colorado were ignored as well in their attempts to gain recognition, a dozen delegations exchanged glances among themselves and then, together, rose and walked out of the chamber.

Outside in the House lobby, nearly a hundred news services including all the major networks, CNN, and newspapers from coast-to-coast who had been following the action on the House floor waited with cameras and microphones. Clay Turner was already speaking to them when he was joined by several dozen more Congressmen and

Congresswomen. There were now almost as many elected officials here as there were reporters.

"This Congress has chosen to play games with the Constitution rather than attend to its duties as specified in that document to which every member inside," he gestured angrily at the doors keeping him from his rightful place on the floor of the House, "*every member*," he emphasized, "has sworn an oath to uphold. Today, they have allowed politics-as-usual to come before their sworn word and their duty. By rights, each and every member within that chamber who did not rise to protest this violation of the Constitution should be driven from Washington and tried for treason." There were gasps from the reporters and flashes from the strobes as all the photographers tried to capture the moment Clay Turner accused the House of Representatives of treason. "If the American people allow this travesty to stand, then I tell you, the United States of America is no more. When the people no longer care about justice, this nation will have stopped being America. Clearly, it's not the America we Texans thought we were joining in 1845. There are a fair number of Texans who still today consider that a mistake, and I have to admit I'm beginning to see their point."

"Congressman Turner," one of the reporters shouted, "has this anything to do with the effort currently underway in both houses to repeal the Second Amendment?"

"Even if it did," Turner shot back, "and I'm not saying it does or it doesn't — what difference does it make? Admitting new states is one of the few things the Constitution actually states as a *duty of Congress*. How can they fritter away their days with nonsensical, not to mention anti-American, tasks such as trashing the Bill of Rights while they ignore the things the Constitution requires they do? Do any of you have a better definition of 'treason'?" Some of the more-traditionalist reporters scribbled notes, but most simply held their microphones closer to get a better sound-level.

Harry Kingsley was there also, and the microphone stuffed into his face ignited all the more basic instincts of the politician. He began to pontificate. "You may think of those of us opposed to the repeal of the Second Amendment as being involved in a conspiracy, but it is a conspiracy to preserve that which our forefathers have passed down to us inviolate. If that's a bad thing, then all of those on the other side of the aisle who call themselves conservatives must step up and admit that they have been doing bad things now for decades. 'Keeping what you've got' is the very essence of conservatism, and while I may style myself 'liberal', I also recognize that throwing away the good is a more grievous sin than keeping the bad. The Second Amendment is not unalloyed evil. I challenge any of you, and by this I

also include my colleagues beyond those doors," he gestured toward the entrance to the House floor, "to show me one instance in all of recorded history — one instance — where restricting weapons to the common man has made that common man safer. I should caution you that embarking upon this challenge is a long road, traveled unsuccessfully by many before you, none of whom have found their grail."

"Senator Kingsley," a reporter thrust forward, "are you suggesting that none of the gun-control laws now in existence have done any good?"

"It's not just my suggestion, son," Kingsley responded looking straight into the reporter's eyes. "Even our own Center for Disease Control in Atlanta is suggesting it. According to them, there's not a stitch of evidence that any of our 20,000-some-odd gun-control laws have done anything to reduce crime. Are you surprised? Why? The only people who pay attention to those laws are, by definition, law abiding citizens. Son, those are the last people you want to not have guns. Are you following me?"

"I don't understand," the reporter pressed. "The National Firearms Act of 1934 took machine guns largely out of circulation. You seem to be saying that's a bad thing. Is that what you're saying?"

"'Largely out of circulation' is exactly the right way to describe the effect of NFA," Kingsley responded. "You can still own a machine gun in forty-one, maybe forty-two states if you jump through all the hoops and file all the right paperwork and pass all the background checks, and pay the \$200 tax on the transfer. There are in excess of three hundred thousand machine guns and submachine guns in the hands of private citizens in this country right this very instant. Did you know that? No? Well, here's a question for you: How many of those legally-owned machine guns are used for nefarious purposes, do you think? Can you recall the last time there was a press release from the Justice Department announcing that an NFA license had been revoked because the owner had held up a bank or a liquor store? Tell me, when was the last time you read about something like that? I apologize," Kingsley tried to inject a little humor into what had become a confrontation, "I know you're supposed to be interviewing me, but I'd really like to hear your answer." Kingsley paused to let the reporter respond.

"Well, Senator," the reporter finally answered, "I can't actually recall ever hearing such a thing."

"And that largely proves the point I was trying to make to you: the good people in this country outnumber criminals twenty-to-one if it isn't five-hundred-to-one. If everyone were encouraged to go about armed, crime would become a very hazardous enterprise

indeed. Those good-hearted-but-misguided souls who think self-defense is a throwback to our caveman past are albeit-unknowingly enabling the criminal element among us. By their actions in that chamber," he again gestured toward the doors to the House floor, thereby labeling his erstwhile colleagues '*good-hearted-but-misguided souls*', "they are creating of the United States one huge criminal-enablement zone, inside which armed criminals can rest assured they will meet no resistance from anyone not in a blue uniform. Remember: it's axiomatic that there's never a cop around when you need one. If they get their wish, they turn you into 'chum', chum: they're going to feed you to the sharks, piece by piece.

"Would you like more proof?" Kingsley teased him. "Look at the cities where 'gun control' is most well developed: New York City, Washington DC, Detroit, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago. Where do these places rate on the 'Most Dangerous Cities' list? Oh, my goodness, look! There they are, leading by example! The most dangerous places are where it's most difficult to legally defend yourself from criminals, the places where criminals-with-guns know they are least likely to encounter deadly resistance. Somebody explain to me how that constitutes 'a good thing'."

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At precisely 8:30 AM on Thursday, a team of deputies armed with AR-15s, M-16s, and riot shotguns entered the Federal Building in Helena, Montana, and approached the security desk in the lobby. The Pinkerton guard at the desk looked up with considerable surprise. "Good morning," he offered. "Is there a problem?"

"Not yet," the chief deputy told him. "Do you have the ability to do an announcement to all areas of this building simultaneously?"

"Uh... yeah, of course..." The deputy came around behind the security desk and took the microphone and gave the Pinkerton a 'thumbs up'. "Press the big bar and talk," the guard instructed him.

"Attention all personnel in the building," the deputy began, "this is deputy sheriff Tom Shields of the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office. Please evacuate the building at once in an orderly manner. Take all valuables with you as you leave as you may not be able to return for some time. Please evacuate the building immediately and as safely as possible." He put the microphone down and unscrewed the cable from the device.

The Pinkerton guard's face was white. "Is there a bomb?" he asked.

"Not that we know of," the deputy answered, looking very unconcerned. In a few moments, workers began to stream from the

building in droves. The building manager was at the front desk in an instant.

"Do we have a problem, Sheriff?" the building manager inquired.

"Sheriff's orders," the deputy replied. "He'll be along in a bit to explain everything."

A few moments later the head of the BATFE office showed up at the security desk. He picked out the chief deputy and button-holed him. "Marv Kramer, chief-of-station, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives," he introduced himself, "What's going on?"

"Sheriff'll be here in a bit. He'll explain everything. That's all I know. Can you please exit the building?" Kramer went through the revolving doors and joined his staff in the park across the street.

Less than ten minutes after the initial announcement, the Sheriff arrived with his driver. His car was mobbed by federal agency department heads anxious to learn what calamity had caused them to evacuate their workplace.

Ben McCullough, Sheriff of Lewis and Clark County, waved his deputies in and told them to set up a perimeter around the building: nobody in, everybody out. Deputies were detailed to bring all the elevators to the lobby and to prop their doors open. Then he turned to the executives who were all expecting bad news. He was going to give them bad news, but it wasn't the bad news they were expecting.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as the constitutional law enforcement officer in Lewis and Clark County, it is my responsibility to see that the safety of the people of the county and the state is protected. This morning I made the determination that the presence of federal law enforcement officers in Lewis and Clark County is detrimental to the public safety. You no longer have authority to operate in this county, and for that reason, I have closed this building as a threat to public safety. Go home." He turned to leave.

"What do you mean 'you've closed the building'?" Marv Kramer demanded. "This is a federal facility. You can't just close it."

McCullough turned to face Kramer and took a quick glance at his security badge. "Yes, I can close it, and I have closed it, and BATFE is out of business in this county. Go home... while you still can."

"Is that some kind of threat?" Kramer was in McCullough's face.

"It's not a threat," McCullough offered him softly, "it's just good advice. If you know good advice when you hear it, you'll pay attention, and go home as I suggested." McCullough again turned away to leave. Kramer pulled an automatic pistol from under his jacket and aimed at McCullough's retreating figure. Before he could

pull the trigger, a 'pop' from a nearby rooftop was followed by Kramer's head exploding in a fan-shaped shower of blood and brain tissue. His lifeless body collapsed in a heap. McCullough turned around to see Kramer crumpled like a wet paper bag on the street. "Anybody else?" he asked. For almost all the people standing there, it had been the first time they had watched someone die.

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Constance Broadley's secretary beeped in: "Governor, there's a call for you on line 2 from Washington: Secretary of the Treasury Dan Grover."

Broadley picked up the phone and pushed the number-2 button with a free fingertip. "Good morning, Secretary Grover. To what do I owe the honor?"

"Governor Broadley, what the hell is going on there? I just received a call from the BATFE deputy chief-of-station that your Sheriff has closed the federal office building in Helena and that a police sniper has shot dead Marv Kramer, my chief-of-station there." Grover paused just long enough to give her a chance to interject something. When that didn't happen he continued: "I want to know if I have to advise the President to activate the Montana Guard."

"First, Dan, the President doesn't have to activate the Guard. They've already been activated on my order. Second, Dan, your chief-of-station was shot when he aimed a firearm at one of our law enforcement officers. That's called 'felonious assault' in 50 states and the District of Columbia. I'm surprised you didn't know that. Your chief-of-station was not simply a felon, he was a rather stupid felon, and you're better off without him. Third, Dan, in all those 50 states a sheriff is a constitutional officer and charged with making decisions about the public safety. The sheriff does not report to the Governor, but rather directly to the people in his county. So, Dan, if you have a problem with the actions of Sheriff Ben McCullough, may I suggest that you take it up directly with Sheriff Ben McCullough?"

"That's hardly the response I expected from you, Governor," Grover responded, his tone noticeably softened. He was hoping that would elevate the level to which this conversation had obviously sunk.

"What sort of response did you expect, Dan?" she countered, again using his familiar name rather than his title.

What the hell kind of question is that, Grover thought. *Is this woman stupid or something?* "I had hoped, Governor, to hear that the Montana Guard had arrested Sheriff McCullough and were holding him for federal authorities."

"Why would they do that, Dan? Sheriff McCullough hasn't done anything illegal that I know of. Whatever would you charge him with?"

Grover was caught completely off-guard by this question. *She can't possibly be serious*, he thought. *Did she have absolutely no inkling of what had just happened within the hour in her own capital city?* "Governor, he closed down the federal building, and he shot a federal law-enforcement officer. Don't either of those strike you as 'illegal'?"

"Dan, that entire operation was videotaped from at least four positions around the federal building. I've seen some of that footage. Your agent here in Helena was pointing a loaded firearm at the sheriff's back. Back-shooters are not thought of very highly anywhere, Dan, but here in Montana we consider them sub-human. The police sharpshooter who pulled the trigger was just clearing a rabid coyote off our streets. I would have done the same if I had been there and if I were that good a shot. Everybody in this building would tell you the same thing." On the other end of the line, Dan Grover's jaw had gone slack. He simply could not believe what he was hearing.

"As to your federal building, Dan," Constance Broadley continued, "that building is lent to the federal government *gratis* by the people of the State of Montana, and your tenancy is 'at will'. That's 'at our will', Dan, not at yours. This morning the Montana legislature ordered the building evacuated and closed after determining your operation to be not in the best interests of the state and the people of Montana. In view of Marv Kramer's actions, I entirely appreciate their decision. I can have someone fax you a copy of the joint resolution if you'd like."

A long pause followed while all of this sank into Dan Grover's consciousness. "Yes, thanks, I'd like to see it."

"I'll see that you get a copy," the Governor assured him, then abruptly hung up.

"Harvey!" she shouted for her personal aide. She needn't have raised her voice. Harvey had been waiting just out-of-sight for all the activity to die down.

"Standing by," Harvey assured her.

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The headline of the New York *Daily News* screamed "TX POWER GRAB!". The Philadelphia *Enquirer* was more to the point: "REBELLION!". The Boston *Globe* simply said: "MT BOOTS FEDS". Their headlines were set before a half-dozen other states took similar actions, and by the time the papers hit the streets they were old news.

The Houston *Chronicle* thumbed its nose at the northern papers with a one-word banner: "SECEDE!"

The President of the United States called the Governor of Texas. "Bill," he began, "I'm considering asking you to call up the Texas Guard."

"Mr. President," Governor Mitchum started with a sigh, "I can call them up, but I can't guarantee any of them will answer. You see, here in Texas, we teach our youngsters about the Constitution, so they'll know you have no justification for activating them beyond the hysterical headlines in a few damnyankee newspapers and the rantings of some Congressional pussy-men. Mr. President, applying force to this situation won't give you a solution. It will just change the nature of the problem. If you want a solution in a hurry, I suggest you call the Congressional leadership over to the Oval Office and tell them all they're gonna' get the most memorable pants-down ass-whuppin' of their entire lives if they don't start acting like they deserve the title 'Honorable'."

"Well, Bill," the President replied, "I appreciate your candor, but you're probably aware the President has very little control over Congress. They don't care what I think, Bill."

"Mr. President," Mitchum pressed, "they don't call it a 'bully pulpit' for nothin'. If you're not willin' to use it to save the country, perhaps you ought to step down and give it over to someone who will."

Doug Farnham, President of the United States of America, felt as though he had been slapped in the face. As little as a week prior, no one would have thought to suggest he was not in control. Now, here was the Governor of a state on the feather-edge of secession — for the second time — suggesting — no, saying it directly — that he was an ineffective chief executive. "Bill, I'll take that under advisement", and he hung up.

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The Majority Leader of the Senate entered the Oval Office in the company of the Minority Whip. They were followed almost immediately by the Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader. They joined the President and his entire cabinet along with two generals with plenty of stars on their epaulets. The President reached under his desk and brought out a broomstick.

"Boys and girls," he addressed them, not caring whether or not they were offended by being so addressed — his Presidency was hanging by a thread because of them — "we've got a hornet's nest out there in that tree," he advised them, pointing out his window. "If any

of you think you haven't caused enough chaos by your actions this week, take this stick and go give that nest a few whacks. In case you haven't been reading the papers, let me bring you up to date: there are now fourteen states that have no substantial federal presence: no FBI, no BATFE, no SSA. The only things still operating under my control are military bases, and that's because they all have fences around them and armed guards at their gates. I'm the first to admit that I'm the prime cause of most of this by my asking for your action to repeal the Second Amendment, and I'm also aware that that was a poorly-thought-out, emotional appeal. I wish to God someone with a clearer head had stopped me from doing that. It was stupid, and I would pay anything to be able to take those words back, to unring that bell. People who, two weeks ago would never have let the thought into their minds, are now talking about seceding. Are any of you ready to consider that you — we — have gone too far this time?"

Julia Finnegan, Speaker of the House, spoke up: "No, Mr. President, they've gone too far. The people of this nation are demanding action from us to lift the scourge of firearms from their backs and I, for one, think you showed great courage when you spoke last to the Congress. Don't let yourself be spooked because a small band of Neanderthals are standing in the way of progress. We're not going to let that happen. They have been de-selected by evolution. If they can't learn to live in a modern world, let them become extinct! Whose side are you on on this issue, Mr. President?"

"Julia, I'm on the side of the United States, which you and your colleagues by your actions this week have made far less united than they have been for a century-and-a-half. Crusades such as you've embarked upon don't just have benefits. They also have costs, and sometimes those costs are high enough that they eat all the benefits away. You think you can 'bull' this campaign through to a successful conclusion. Maybe you can, but at what cost? You've had to throw away two hundred years of collegiality to get this far. Do you think no one watches C-SPAN anymore? Even I'm getting mail complaining about the way you silenced your Congressional opponents."

"We're the majority because the American people voted us in," she snapped back. "What would you have us do? Ignore the mandate the people gave us?"

"What mandate is that?" Farnham snapped back, leaning in to get his face even closer to hers. "Take a look at this map," he ordered them. It showed a swath of states from the Gulf of Mexico sweeping up to the Canadian border (with Mississippi, Alabama, and Vermont somewhat isolated) grayed-out on an otherwise-white map of the United States. "Those gray states are so opposed to what you're doing

that they're ready to start another Civil War, and the rest of the states are only barely what you would call 'on your side'. The last time we had a civil war, two percent of the population, mostly young men, died in battle. If that were to happen today, the number would be 6 million dead soldiers, and we're much more efficient at killing now in the 21st century than they were in the 19th. It could be twelve million. It could be twenty million. Are you prepared for that? Is that what your aim is?"

Julia's icy stare told him all he needed to know. "Mr. President," she almost hissed, "I don't need to have my devotion to this nation questioned. You should be asking those who seem intent on going to war." She grabbed her briefcase, turned and left. The others shrugged their shoulders, and followed her out.

"Well," he muttered to his vice-President, "that didn't go as well as I had hoped." Turning to the generals he asked them: "What are my options?"

"You have a limited range of options, as I see it," General Tobias started, "and each one is worse than the other. The bulk of the regular Army/Marines is already deployed in the Middle East and unavailable if you don't want to risk destabilizing the whole area. If, as you told me earlier, you cannot count on the Texas Guard, it seems very likely you will also not be able to count on the New Mexico or Colorado Guards. That leaves you with several much smaller guard units from multiple states, some of whom may be unwilling to go to war with their fellow countrymen. The situation in Montana is nearly identical: The Dakotas' Guard units could be moved west into Montana, but everything is up-in-the-air when the subject is 'civil war'. To be blunt, Mr. President, I don't really know how to advise you."

"What if Bill Mitchum was exaggerating? Maybe the Texas Guard will answer a call-up?"

"It's certainly worth a try, Mr. President," General Tobias offered. "At least then you'd know for sure whether you had a war on your hands."

"Order the appropriate Guards activated under your command, General Tobias. That's an order from the Commander-in-Chief."

Tobias saluted. "Yes, sir."

Phones throughout the West rang. "You've been activated," they were told. "Report to your post." Within hours, thousands of part-time soldiers were reporting to their National Guard Armories for activation. Montana's National Guard had already been activated and for them it was simply a formality that their command had been turned over to General Tobias. Tobias, in turn, had managed a

conference call with his Colonels to fill them in on what he considered his priorities.

"I want Malmstrom AFB reinforced," he informed the Colonel from the Montana National Guard. To the Colonel from the Texas National Guard, he explained that it was vital the bases in and around San Antonio, especially, be able to resist any armed attack. "Any of your troops you consider unreliable must not be part of any reinforcement. Understood?" Everyone agreed that they did, indeed, understand. Other similar assignments were handed out to the senior officers from other states where the civil authorities had indicated their willingness to sever ties with the federal government.

Throughout Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, National Guard troops, now fully armed and provisioned, began streaming toward sensitive military bases to provide reinforcement against any possible uprising by sheriffs, state police, and local unorganized militia. At the gates of Malmstrom AFB on the outskirts of Great Falls, Montana, a line of eighty-or-so olive drab vehicles halted to be recognized by the APs.

"Colonel Calhoun, Montana National Guard, reporting for reinforcement duty," the AP announced them to the Commanding General. Moments later, he rolled the gate back to admit them. The last truck through the gate circled around the guard shack and six soldiers hopped down to the ground. "We're your relief," their leader informed the senior AP.

"We're not due to be relieved for more than an hour," the Montanans were told, "and nobody warned us we were going to be relieved by National Guard personnel, either."

"Don't ask me," the guardsman shrugged, "They give me orders, and I carry them out. I guess you can stay if you want, but we can't be anyplace else until we get new orders."

"So, what are you supposed to do here," the AP sergeant asked.

"I guess we're here to identify the rest of the trucks."

"What 'rest of the trucks'?" the sergeant looked puzzled.

"There's another hundred-plus trucks and buses behind us," he was told. "We can vouch for them so they can be waved through without delay."

"Oh, yeah," the AP sergeant nodded. "That makes sense."

5 - Breaking News

Abilene, TX

Colonel Harlan Carter leaped from the APC that had just delivered him to the headquarters building at Dyess AFB, Abilene Texas, adjusted his uniform, and strode proudly through the front door past the salutes of the guards stationed there. General Vinson's secretary greeted him: "Colonel Carter, the General is waiting for you. Please go right in." Carter nodded and swept past her into General Vinson's inner office, saluted the General, then responded to his outstretched hand.

"Good to see you again, Harlan," the General started. "Any trouble on the way in?"

"Not a bit. There are some protesters with signs outside the front gates, but all they have are signs. How are things here?" Carter inquired.

"We're relaxed. The men realize we're in a pretty good situation, so no one's really worrying. On the other hand, this is Texas, and there's lots of high-class weaponry out there in the hands of civilians. Now that you and your men are here, I guess we don't even have to worry about that." General Vinson sounded relieved.

"I've sent a contingent over to the control tower and others to the main hangars to reinforce and relieve your men who must be anxious to get a little break," Carter informed him. "If your men are as sharp as you used to insist we were, they'll be waiting for orders from you to stand down."

General Vinson took the hint. He buzzed his aide and told him to alert the section leaders they were authorized to stand down in favor of the Reserves now on their way or already there. General Vinson opened the door of the credenza behind his desk and pulled out a bottle. "Shall we toast the arrival of the Guard?" he suggested.

"An excellent idea. Don't mind if I do." Carter took the offered glass and held it out to receive a cascade of Scotch whiskey, then touched his glass to General Vinson's. "The Texas Guard," Vinson raised his glass, "ready on a moment's notice."

"...or less," Carter added with a smile. Vinson downed his portion. Carter took a sip. The pager clipped to Carter's belt sounded. Carter slipped it from its holster and looked at the message, then returned the device to his belt.

"Problem?" Vinson inquired.

"Nothing that would make me worry," Carter assured him. "I'm getting hungry. Isn't it about dinner time?" The two headed off for the Officer's Mess. At the main gate, 121 trucks and buses filled with Texas Guardsmen rolled through into the compound and fanned out to their assigned positions.

Luke AFB, Phoenix AZ:

As with all the other bases in the corridor stretching from the Rio Grande to the Canadian border, Luke had been on high alert since early the preceding day, and the airmen standing guard along the entire perimeter and at strategic points within the base itself were starting to fade just as Air National Guard reservists began to arrive. The reservists fanned out to every potential weak spot, relieving and replacing the regulars who now manned those posts. One by one, the regulars stood down from guard duty in favor of the fresh troops pulled in from all across the state. The main gate was now staffed by Arizona Air National Guard, and all the hangars, bunkers, and storehouses were safely in the hands of the Guard while the regular staff streamed into the mess hall for the first hot food some of them had seen all day. Colonel Jeff Peabody escorted General Nathan Ordner into the mess hall and saw that the General was able to relax for the first time since going to red alert thirty hours ago. Then Peabody excused himself:

"I have to make my rounds, General Ordner," Peabody explained. "I can't rest until I know the base is 100 percent secure." He saluted the General and left.

In the street outside the mess hall, two APCs and a Signals van waited. Peabody hoisted himself into the Signals truck and took report from the Captain whose charge covered 'communications'.

"All stations report 'ready', Colonel," the Captain assured him. "The time is 0047 ZULU exactly."

"Very well," Peabody replied, "lock it up."

The Captain motioned to the tech operating the console who leaned into the microphone: "Raptor to all stations: execute 'lock'."

The nine regular Air Force officers and twenty-two enlisted men who had stayed on their posts with the newly-arrived Arizona Air National Guard troops suddenly found themselves staring at the muzzles of rifles and pistols. They were disarmed, handcuffed, and transported to the cluster of buildings in the center of the base. Outside the mess hall, a ring of APCs trained their machine guns on the doors and windows.

At Dyess in Abilene, Davis-Monthan in Tucson, Nellis AFB outside Las Vegas, Hill AFB near Ogden and Tooele Army Depot, Ft Huachuca in Arizona, Ft Bliss in El Paso, Ft Hood up toward Waco, at Ft Sill in Oklahoma, and at Malmstrom AFB near Great Falls Montana, similar scenes played out, all at exactly 6:47 PM Central Time, 5:47 PM Mountain Time.

At the same time, 7:47 PM Eastern Time, faxes at the offices of all the major news services, all Congressional offices, and the White House began spitting out paper:

To The People and the States of the United States of America:

*Whereas,
The first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America are commonly known as 'the Bill of Rights', and*

*Whereas,
the said Bill of Rights was promulgated in order to obtain the consent of sufficient States' conventions to the said Constitution of the United States of America, and*

*Whereas,
the aforementioned Bill of Rights is thus a necessary component of the said Constitution of the United States of America, and*

*Whereas,
the Congress of the United States of America has attempted to alter this necessary component of the said Constitution of the United States of America by removing guarantees specified therein, and*

*Whereas,
the people of the States of Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Wyoming, and Vermont have been denied their rights under the First Amendment to the aforementioned Constitution of the United States of America to petition for a redress of grievances, and*

*Whereas,
The Congress of the United States having deliberately*

shirked its Constitutional duties, viz: to admit new States to the Union, and

*Whereas,
Such dereliction of duty was done with malice aforethought in order to force such changes to the Bill of Rights as to deny and nullify guarantees made therein, and*

*Whereas,
the Governors of the States of Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Wyoming, and Vermont have determined that such flagrant disregard of its Constitutional duties has abrogated the Union formerly known as The United States of America,*

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Governors and the People of the aforementioned States that their bonds to the said United States of America are irreparably broken.

and it was signed by thirteen Governors.

Gus Schwartz pulled the sheet clear of the fax machine at CNN's headquarters in Atlanta and started reading. Before he had reached the third 'whereas' his hands were shaking, and he was unable to keep his eyes from jumping to the last paragraph. "...their bonds to the said United States of America are irreparably broken." Unable to tear his eyes away from the text quivering in front of him, his left hand fumbled blindly for the telephone at the edge of his desk. Finding the handset, he lifted it and instinctively dialed '444', the active program director. The call was answered on the first ring, but Gus was unable to actually speak.

The Program Director glanced at the display on his phone and prompted: "Gus?... Gus?..."

"Bob," Gus finally managed, "you need to clear some time right away for a breaking story."

"Local or National?" Bob probed.

"World," Gus answered after a short pause to ask himself whether this was merely national. He had decided instantly that it was more than that. It was very much more than that.

"How much time do you think we need?"

"Hard to tell, Bob," Gus answered starting to regain control of himself. "How much would you want to spend on the Civil War?"

"I'd give the Civil War 24-hour wall-to-wall coverage if it were to happen right now. Is your story that big?" Bob waited for Gus to answer, but when several seconds ticked by without a response the implication of what Gus had said rose to the surface of Bob's consciousness. "Oh, my God!" he gasped, "Are you serious? I'll get a team on it right away," and the line dropped.

Within minutes the scroll across the bottom of the screen for all of CNN's feeds began to carry the message: "Thirteen states secede — civil war imminent" and the 'talking heads' began to alert listeners to the biggest news story it had carried since it was founded. Thirteen reporters each phoned one of the thirteen governors who had signed the proclamation and began to do pre-interviews, gathering facts and sound bites for later use when one or two of them would be interviewed live. Todd Crenshaw drew Bill Mitchum, Governor of Texas, to interview, a stroke of luck that, he felt pretty confident, would make his name as recognizable as Wolf Blitzer's. As the phone burred in his ear waiting for someone in Austin to pick up, he frantically scribbled notes for questions he wanted to ask. At 7:55 PM a voice on the other end announced: "Governor's office."

"This is Todd Crenshaw with CNN in Atlanta," he informed the operator. "I'd like to speak with Governor Mitchum, please."

"One moment, please, Mr. Crenshaw, the Governor is on another call. Can you hold?"

Damn it, he cursed to himself, someone else has a faster dialing finger. "Yes," he told her, "I'll hold." *Might as well hold*, he thought. *I've got nothing better to do.*

But he didn't wait that long. Mitchum finished up his call with Lawrence "Buddy" Tyler, Governor of Arizona, in which they each pledged to the other 'our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor', exactly the same terms agreed to nearly two hundred fifty years prior. He disconnected the call with Tyler and punched the flashing '#3' button on his phone. "Mitchum," he announced himself.

"Governor Mitchum, this is Todd Crenshaw with CNN in Atlanta. We have received a fax within the past ten minutes and would like to ask you a few questions. Do you have a few moments?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Crenshaw, as long as you're not going to waste my time with damn-fool rhetorical questions. What's on your mind?" Mitchum asked, having set the tone for any subsequent interview. Todd scratched out two of the questions. He was not about to do anything to cause Bill Mitchum to hang up on him.

"Governor Mitchum, the fax we have... is it genuine? That is, was it issued by or with the authorization of the Governor's Office?"

"Mr. Crenshaw, you have the genuine article there. The other twelve governors will also assert the same thing. Yes, indeed, it's genuine."

"Governor, the fax doesn't use the word 'secede' although the Houston *Chronicle* used exactly that term the day before yesterday. Nevertheless, is that the intent? Have these states, Texas and the others, seceded from the United States?"

"Mr. Crenshaw, it would be wrong to use the word 'secede'," Mitchum began, "and that is why it does not appear in that proclamation. It is actually more accurate to say that the United States of America has committed a breach of contract as regards its duties to the States. The thirteen States jointly issuing that communiqué agree that we are unwilling to condone such a breach. We, each of the States, consider that, rather than us leaving the Union, the Union has thrown us out, and we have all agreed that that is not what we consider 'a problem'. Are you with me?" Mitchum didn't wait for an answer. He didn't really care whether Crenshaw was 'with him' or not. Instead, he pressed onward: "We're simply giving the other 37 States what they appear to want: namely, to be separated from those who disagree with them. We believe they've made an error they will come to regret, but it is clearly their choice to make. We are, all of us, quite saddened that a system with such great promise would be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency, but we cannot in good conscience let those without principles drag those of us who retain them down into their gutter-of-choice."

Crenshaw scribbled notes throughout Mitchum's answer, and was ready with a follow-on question based on his own words: "So, you believe that Congress has abrogated the agreement with the states, and, therefore, the split that we see forming is not of your doing, but is the work of others. Is that correct?"

"Let's be clear on this," Mitchum sounded as if he were losing patience already. "There is no 'agreement with the States' for Congress to abrogate. The United States Congress, indeed all of the federal government, was formed by action of the original thirteen States when those States granted a few — let's emphasize that word: few — select powers to the federal government. In effect, we the States acting in partnership, hired the federal government to do certain tasks smaller entities don't do quite as well as a single, larger entity. National defense is one of those tasks. Providing a single currency for all the States is another. There are very few tasks the States have assigned to the federal government, and there are a few areas marked 'strictly off-limits'. What you're seeing in Washington is a hostile takeover by a group of raider states intent on changing the nature of the partnership we all share... shared. Yes, the agreement

has been abrogated, but it's not an agreement between the States and the federal government. It's an agreement among the States, period.

"There's another way we can look at this: The Declaration of Independence tells us why governments exist at all: '...to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...' Those rights the Declaration speaks of are individual, human rights, things like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That is the primary function of government. Some will tell you it's the only function of government, but let's not argue the point, OK? Well, that government we the people created to secure our rights is now busily working to destroy those rights we hired it to secure. This government just failed its periodic performance appraisal, and we're firing it.

"Furthermore, it might be instructive for you to read the Texas Declaration of Independence. The conditions that caused us Texians to split from Mexico in 1836 we're seeing again this year in Washington DC. Our 21st-century United States is doing exactly the same things done by a 19th-century Mexico. Son, if I didn't take action to resist that, the people of the Republic of Texas would have to fire me. Are you still with me?"

"Yes, I think so," Crenshaw confirmed. "So, this is really all about the recent attempt — the current attempt to repeal the Second Amendment, then? That's what caused the abrogation?"

"Let's not call it a 'cause'," Mitchum soothed him. "The feds have been pulling crap like this for a hundred years. There's the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, for instance. The feds had no authority to do that, but most people just shrugged and said 'gee, that sounds like an idea we ought to support', and we let them get away with it. The National Firearms Act of 1934 was passed supposedly to make it hard for criminals to get machine guns and the suchlike. In fact, it did no such thing. It just made it harder for the average Joe to get them. It did, however, provide employment for an army of Treasury agents who had been left without a mission when Prohibition was repealed. And the result: in the 90s, there was an incident here in Texas near Waco where 83 people were killed over a tax matter of about \$1,000. That's right, those Branch Davidians were attacked and killed because (it was claimed) they had something like five machine guns and hadn't paid the \$200 tax on each one. So this latest attempt to make it harder for ordinary people to get the tools for self-defense isn't really a 'cause'. Call it a 'trigger'. We're done letting people screw us over. When we dug in our heels, those raiders twisted the system to get what they wanted. When we tried to twist the system back, we were denied due process. Fine. They're entitled to a country shaped the way they want it. That's not the shape we agreed to when we joined

the partnership, and it's not a shape we're any longer willing to live with. In fact, we're no longer willing to live with the current distorted shape, the result of a hundred-fifty years of misgovernment. If those other 37 States want us as part of their partnership, they're going to have to roll back lots of laws that should never have been passed. They pushed us over the edge, and now they'll have to work — hard — if they want us back."

"I think I understand, Governor," Crenshaw affirmed. "We also have reports, just now coming in, suggesting that several military bases in the southwest have been occupied by National Guard troops. Can you confirm or deny those reports, Governor?"

Mitchum's aide was in the room listening on a silenced extension. Mitchum glanced at him with a look that clearly asked: "Yes or no? Confirm or deny?" The aide shrugged his shoulders. *In for a penny, in for a pound*, Mitchum thought. "Mr. Crenshaw," Mitchum started with a sigh, "I'm sure you can see that, should the United States decide to contest our departure, having active US military bases within our borders would put us into an entirely untenable position. For the safety of the citizens of our respective States, all bases presenting a credible threat have been neutralized. It is our intention to allow the soldiers and airmen stationed at those bases to depart in peace as soon as such can be arranged — contingent, of course, on hostilities not being then in progress."

"So those soldiers are, for the time being, hostages?" Crenshaw probed.

"I can't stop you from using that word, Mr. Crenshaw, but it's not a word I would have chosen. If those soldiers are to be considered hostages, then may we also consider hostages those members of the Texas Guard now deployed in foreign countries where our national interest, to say nothing of Texas' interest, is of the most esoteric sort — where it exists at all? Perhaps we ought to see what disposition is made of our own citizens in far-off lands before we decide how to categorize those citizens of other States now stationed in ours."

"And, Governor, what of the many bases scattered from Texas to Montana? What will happen to them?"

"Todd, I have been in consultation with senior staff of the Texas Guard, and I can tell you that no decision will be made on that subject until the day after tomorrow at the very earliest. There's a great deal of *administrivia* to be worked through before we even have a plausible inventory to discuss with anyone. Are we about done here, Todd? My aide is waving frantically, so it appears that other matters are calling to me."

"Thank you very much for your time, Governor Mitchum."

Mitchum's aide was at his side to tell him the President of the United States was anxious to talk to him. "Really?" Mitchum mused. "Fancy that." He picked up the receiver again and pushed the button for line #1: "Mitchum," he announced himself.

"Governor Mitchum, the President wishes to speak with you. Please stay on the line," a secretarial voice informed him. An instant later, President Douglas Farnham's voice greeted him: "Governor Mitchum," he began, "I suspect we are rapidly approaching the point-of-no-return. It's imperative that you gain control of the situation in Texas, Governor, before we actually get there."

"Is there an 'or else' attached to that, Doug?" Mitchum asked.

"There is," Farnham replied. "...or else the Pentagon will gain control of the situation for you. I'm still hoping, Bill, that that won't be necessary."

Mitchum's aide slipped a note in front of him. It said *'Malmstrom secured'*. "I believe I advised you some time ago, Doug, that applying force to this situation would not give you a solution, that it would merely change the shape of the problem. Do you recall that, Doug?" Farnham acknowledged that he did, indeed, recall those words. "In that case, Doug —"

Farnham interrupted. "I'm usually referred to as 'Mr. President', Governor. Am I not entitled to the respect of the office?"

Mitchum wondered how long it would take for Farnham to react to being called 'Doug' repeatedly and smirked to himself inwardly. "Doug, I'm not convinced you're my President anymore." It was another slap in the face for Farnham, and he was growing not to like it or this person who seemed to take such pleasure in it. "My President would be doing a lot more to preserve the Union, and he wouldn't be rattling sabers. He would be looking for real answers to real problems and not threatening military action that could more readily lead to world-wide conflagration than to a reformation of our nation. Failing that, Doug, he would be wishing us well on the path we have chosen, even if it isn't the path he would have chosen. When you're ready to do that, Doug, call me back so I can call you 'Mr. President' again." Mitchum waited for a reply, but all he heard was the line disconnecting.

6 - Entangling Alliances

Vincent Marriner, Prime Minister of Canada, waited until all the invitees had found their seats. "By now you must all be aware of the events unfolding to the south. Canada has a long-standing relationship with the United States, and these events put us in a very unusual position: is our relationship with a single central government or is it with fifty individual states? How ought we react to what's happening there? What should our position be *vis-à-vis* those breakaway states? I have my own feelings on the topic, but I want to hear yours."

René Lalouche was the first to offer an opinion: "I see two aspects, Prime Minister, that should concern us, and a third that should concern us very gravely. First, having two countries (or more, depending on how they arrange their polity) to the south of us gives us a relative advantage. We would no longer have a single monolithic industrial giant along our border, and, relative to each we would be stronger than as against all of them combined. Then, too, there has always been the fear lurking in the minds of Canadians that one day we could be annexed. It wouldn't be the first time the United States has done such a thing: the Hawaiian Islands were once a functioning monarchy until American businesses decided it needed to be a State.

"Second, we can rationally support a 'hands-off' approach on the grounds that we don't have the ability to decide which of these factions is the real United States.

"The third aspect, the one I consider of the greater concern, is that backing the eventual loser or even just failing to back the eventual winner could result in a severe degradation of our historically amiable relationship. That is, a 'hands-off' policy could have negative repercussions. Coloring that is the fact that this sort of thing has happened before to our American cousins, and the industrial might of the northeast was decisive then. Do we have any intelligence to indicate whether it still would be?"

Marriner glanced around the room for anyone who might want to respond. Kirsten O'Dwyer, Deputy Director/Operations for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, caught his eye. "Do you have something on this, Kirsten?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied, "I would like to address that point. The American Civil War occurred in the middle of the 19th century when the North (called 'the Union') was relatively heavily industrialized and the South (called 'the Confederacy') was almost entirely agricultural.

Even so, the conflict lasted four years. It also produced over 600,000 casualties (if you count both sides). For comparison, the United States didn't rack up 600,000 non-civil-war casualties until 1968 in the heat of the Viet Nam conflict, so their Civil War wasn't very civil. In fact, it left a scar on the country that has never healed. Even today you can find Confederate battle flags decorating pick-up trucks, and not just in the South.

"Today, the situation is very different than it was in the 1860's. Industrialization is fairly well spread throughout the country, so there's no real 'industrial heartland' anymore. Agriculture is likewise well-spread but the climate in the states that have declared their independence is not generally very conducive to high-yield operations, save for Mississippi and Alabama. Those states, however, are isolated and they probably cannot withstand even the most casual of military incursions. The same is true for Vermont with whom we share some border. If Vermont tries to assert its independence by force of arms, we will have war on our doorstep.

"The ten western states form a solid band from Texas in the south to Montana and Idaho in the north, cutting off the States of California, Oregon, and Washington from the others in the East and Midwest. While these states aren't what we might call 'industrial powerhouses', and they certainly are not very conducive to agriculture, they do have advantages that make them a force to be reckoned with: military bases. There are, in those ten states, well over a dozen bases that are critical to the defense of North America, and they are, apparently, all solidly in the hands of National Guard troops. One of these bases is Malmstrom AFB east of Great Falls, Montana. Malmstrom is 'Minuteman Central' for the United States. That one base has enough muscle to wipe out all life on Earth. If there's an attack on Malmstrom, we could have something a lot worse than just 'war on our doorstep'. If there's a chance diplomacy could work to defuse this situation, we ought to jump on it with both feet."

A murmur of assent rippled around the room and one of the cabinet ministers offered: "...and if we're actively talking to both sides as an intermediary, it would be seen by both in a positive light."

Kirsten O'Dwyer had more to add. "There are only two outcomes we would consider 'positive': One, an amicable resolution is reached among the states resulting in the *status quo ante*: all things as they were last week. Two, a peaceful secession results in two or more polities living amicably side-by-side. Anything else must be considered 'negative'. Whether there's one country south of us or two or twenty, if they aren't friendly to each other Canada will feel the heat, and we will be drawn into war if for no other reason than we're too close to avoid it."

"Your suggestions, then, Kirsten?" the Prime Minister prodded.

"Put on your Henry Kissinger face, Mr. Prime Minister, and get ready to do some shuttle-diplomacy. Get ready to do *lots* of shuttle-diplomacy."

"Thank you all for your opinions. I'll try to keep you fully-informed. Please keep your calendars reasonably clear for the next few days. I think we're all going to have to be quite flexible for the foreseeable future."

"Mr. Prime Minister," Lalouche called to him. "We never heard your opinion on the matter."

"That's true, René," and he turned away with a smile.

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Doug Farnham had his attention riveted on the presentation before him. The cabinet officers seated at the table with him were equally fixed. General Tobias outlined the situation for them:

"All the major installations in the ten western states have been occupied, and we are no longer in control there. In fact, we're not even getting good satellite information. Since they know the schedules for overflies, they can time their outside activity for periods when there's nothing looking down. One thing we do know is that almost all the A-10s mothballed at Davis-Monthan are now officially missing. If we wind up fighting the kind of war I think this will turn out to be, we're going to be very sorry we didn't destroy those A-10s instead of mothballing them, and they're going to be very glad.

"As for an assault, there's nothing we can attack — conventionally — without giving them 35 minutes' warning. Malmstrom can retaliate in half that."

"What about the launch codes?" one of the cabinet secretaries asked.

"We have no word on conditions at Malmstrom," Tobias responded. "A high-security base like Malmstrom typically has poor-to-nonexistent cell phone coverage, for obvious reasons. When the Montana Guard seized the base, all communications with us ceased. In my opinion it's very unlikely they were able to secure the launch codes, but is there anyone here who'd like to roll those dice for double or nothing? Further complicating matters, we've looked into the background of the eleven people on the base with enough access to find the launch codes. Eight of them are from those ten western states. We hope those men have enough loyalty to keep their mouths shut — in fact, I have the utmost confidence in their dedication to duty — but all we need is one whose loyalty to his state is pre-eminent and the game is over. We can, of course, nuke the area 'til it's liquid, but

that's not going to go over very well with our Canadian friends. As I said once before, we've got very few options and each one is worse than the other. I can't express to you how happy I am that *you* have to make the decisions and I only have to execute them."

"Stealth fighters," another suggested.

"There's always that," Tobias said thoughtfully. "If we do, our first target should be the B1-Bs at Dyess and hope they don't have two or three airborne and ready because that could be very unpleasant for Chicago and Kansas City, if you catch my drift."

"Cruise missiles?"

"Good for messing up their infrastructure. Very good for stirring up a hornet's nest. I don't know how many of you were here when the President offered the Speaker of the House a broomstick to whack a hornet's nest out on the grounds. Nobody took him up on the offer. I can't say I'm looking forward to it myself, gentlemen. For the first time in my career, I'd be deliberately killing Americans."

"What are you suggesting, General," Farnham prompted him, "negotiations?"

"Mr. President, that would be my first choice, yes," Tobias told him.

"General, these are terrorists and traitors you want us to negotiate with. Do you think negotiating with such people would be productive? And what of our long-standing policy of not negotiating with terrorists?"

"I'm forced by the question to be much more frank than I would ordinarily be, Mr. President," Tobias started. "I hope you'll understand that I mean no disrespect to you or your office when I say that such a position is both unjustified and counter-productive. We're not talking about foreigners, Mr. President. These are people who, as little as a week ago, you would have invited to dinner at the White House, sir. Before we label them 'this' or 'that', we need to ask how it is that we have gone from you smiling for the cameras while shaking their hand to us thinking about bombing them out of existence. I think any honest person must conclude that we have given them cause —"

"General," Farnham interrupted, "Are you calling me 'dishonest'?"

"I said I meant no disrespect to you or your office," Tobias replied. He was obviously angry. "If you don't want to hear what I have to say, if you don't want my advice, I'll stop. If you think my advice is intolerable, you may have my resignation effective immediately. I have to tell you up front, Mr. President, that I'm half-hoping you'll demand my resignation. I have no desire whatsoever to go to war with my countrymen."

"That's a cowardly remark, General," Farnham, equally angrily retorted.

"Mr. President, the task before you is too important for it to be burdened by someone whose courage, loyalty, and insight you do not have the utmost confidence in. I cannot allow this operation to be compromised by my presence here. I resign my commission effective immediately." Tobias unpinned the stars from his uniform, dropped them on the conference table, and left the room.

The Vice President buried his head in his hands. "Doug, are you crazy? You've just thrown away the best tactician the U S Army has had in thirty years. You're trashing our most valuable assets from the top down."

"We don't have room in this endeavor for cowards and traitors," Farnham answered smugly. "Only boldness and reckless disregard for one's own safety will win a victory for us here. We're better off without Tobias, but I acknowledge the value he could be were he to switch sides. Have him arrested. I want there to be no chance he might head west." Two Secret Service agents left to follow Tobias and carry out their President's order.

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A chartered Air Canada Embraer 190 lifted off from Macdonald-Cartier International Airport headed for Washington National Airport and another for Bergstrom International in Austin. On board the first was René Lalouche, Marriner's Foreign Minister; on the second, Marriner himself. Their mission: to get one side or the other — preferably both — to forego any aggressive moves toward the other. Lalouche's plane was met by a car from the Canadian embassy, and he was whisked directly to the White House. About an hour later, Marriner's plane was met by a car brought in from the embassy in Houston, and he was transported to the Governor's mansion.

When the Canadian Embassy calls the White House and says their Foreign Minister wishes to speak with the President one-on-one, 'yes' can be the only answer. Lalouche got a police escort from Washington National to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue where his car got only the most cursory glance before being admitted inside the gates. From touchdown to shaking hands with the President of the United States, not quite 17 minutes had elapsed. Lalouche was suitably impressed.

"René," the President started, "I'm always glad to see you, of course, but where is Prime Minister Marriner?"

"The Prime Minister is otherwise engaged what with the heightened tension attendant to this very uncomfortable situation,"

Lalouche offered. "He begs you to excuse him and consider that I am speaking with his voice."

"Of course, René. I realize Canada must be as anxious as we over the potential for armed conflict, but I want you and your Prime Minister to rest assured we will do all in our power to prevent any conflict from spilling across our border."

Lalouche nodded in acknowledgement. "Mr. President, that is precisely what I have been sent to discuss with you. Canada sees this primarily as a squabble between brothers, and I have been sent to ask you — to urge you — to extend a hand of friendship and peace to those states, your brothers, who claim to have been mistreated. More than just 'preventing conflict from spilling across the border', our aim is simply to prevent conflict from happening in the first place. We don't want to see our neighbors to the south bleeding — any of them. To be blunt, we think a conflict between the states could not be prevented from spilling across the border. We would be dragged into a war with no winners, and we would be forced to take the side of one and place ourselves in the position of being enemies of the other. It's not something we're looking forward to. For the sake and the safety of all of North America, we believe it's imperative that a resolution be reached before shots are fired in anger. Tell me what Canada can do to make that happen."

"Well, then, René," Farnham retorted, "perhaps Canada ought to be making the same argument to the leaders of this rebellion. The United States of America certainly does not want to engage in another Civil War, but circumstances could easily force us into one. It is critical that those breakaway states not do anything aggressive to which we would be forced to respond. I assure you, René, that only they can start such a war. Unfortunately, they seem to be very close to doing something that would mandate a retaliatory response from us. If we wish to keep war from breaking out, Canada should be pressuring them rather than us."

"Mr. President, I assure you that Canada is also making the same appeal to those breakaway states," Lalouche offered. "We recognize that only by having both sides in this dispute take a conciliatory position can we avoid massive bloodshed. You can be assured Canada will do everything in its power to enable a peaceful resolution. If you think there's anything more we can do that we're not doing, you have but to mention it and it will be handled."

Farnham smiled. "That's very good news, René, and I'm sure the members of my cabinet will be most pleased when I give them the news of your efforts to secure a peaceful resolution. I hope you'll be able to join me and Mrs. Farnham for dinner tonight."

"I wish I could, Mr. President," Lalouche sighed. "Things are so unsettled at the moment that I must return to Ottawa as soon as our business here is concluded, except that I have some matters to attend to at the Embassy here in Washington before I return, so once again let me assure you of Canada's best wishes for an amicable resolution to your problem." He extended his hand and the President shook it. Lalouche and two Embassy officials then left the White House headed for the Embassy.

After he left, four of Farnham's cabinet entered the Oval Office. "What did you think?" Farnham asked them.

"He's going back to Ottawa," one of them mused, "He's headed north, not west. How serious is he about pressuring the breakaways if he's not even going there to talk to them?"

"That was what flitted through my mind when he said it," Farnham agreed. "What's the possibility this visit is just window dressing? That Canada is either in league with them or is simply playing both sides of the street?"

"I think we have to allow that that's a real possibility, Mr. President."

"So, what was he hoping to accomplish by this visit?" Farnham mused. "To get us to hold off any action pending news that might never come of a breakthrough in negotiations? Maybe we already have the upper hand and Lalouche is buying time for his friends out west? Maybe, giving them enough time to acquire the launch codes?"

"I don't think so," Farnham's Secretary of Defense interjected. "They would have had those codes within a few hours, or they're not going to get them at all. If they don't have them by now, we're safe. I think we need to be more concerned with them moving air power to positions from which they can launch attacks on our close-in assets. I'm most worried about the B1-Bs at Dyess. They can pack a tremendous punch."

"Let's get Gates in here to discuss it."

General Gates hurried into the Oval Office a quarter-hour later, still adjusting his uniform, saluted the Commander-in-Chief, and waited to be addressed.

"General," Farnham started, "Everyone is worried about the B1-Bs at Dyess. Is there anything we can do about them?"

Gates flipped open his cell phone and pushed a few buttons. In a moment he was connected to the CNO, the Chief of Naval Operations. "Karl, what, if anything, do we have in the Gulf of Mexico?"

Admiral Karl Wolfson had been waiting for just such a question for several days, and in an attempt to be able to give a welcome answer had moved the Guided Missile Cruiser Vicksburg (CG-69) and

several auxiliaries into the western Gulf. "Vicksburg is on station about one hundred seventy miles southwest of New Orleans," Wolfson told him. "She's been told to be ready to fire. All she needs is the target."

"What's in range?" Gates asked. "What kind of targeting options do we have?"

"The Tomahawks can reach into New Mexico, so anything closer is possible. What's the objective?"

"The President is worried about the B1-Bs at Dyess. Is Abilene in range?"

"Sure," Wolfson assured him. "We might have trouble reaching out as far as Huachuca, but Bliss is do-able. When do you want to launch?"

Gates turned to the President, started to cover the mouthpiece but stopped midway. He wasn't going to say or hear anything Karl Wolfson couldn't share. "Mr. President, Admiral Wolfson is ready to strike anything in Texas almost out as far as El Paso. He awaits your orders."

"General Gates," the President began, "you're the expert here. I'd like to hear your suggestions about how we ought to proceed. If we're going to strike first, we should be ready to launch a full-scale operation, though, don't you agree? I don't want to just swat some flies."

"That's exactly correct, Mr. President. We've had Guard units from several states standing by now for a few days, waiting for the right moment to attack. I expect that we'll only get a single chance to make serious inroads, so we need to coordinate everything very tightly. I suggest that we be ready to occupy Malmstrom, Dyess, Luke, Nellis, Ft Hood, and Ft Sill at a minimum. We can land C-5s at the air bases and deliver troops directly, but we're going to have to jump into Hood and Sill." He took a paper from his inside tunic pocket and showed it to Farnham. "This is the schedule my staff has worked out for the operation. We'll add to this Vicksburg launching to paste Dyess about ten minutes before we fly in."

"While you're at it, have Vicksburg drop one on the Texas Statehouse," Farnham snarled. "With any luck that son-of-a-bitch Mitchum will be at home when it arrives."

"Did you catch that, Karl?" Gates asked into his phone.

"Sure did, Tom. Do you think one will do it?"

"Yeah, just one. Dyess is the primary target. It doesn't matter if every 'bone' on the lot is trashed as long as none of them get airborne. Can you handle that?"

"It'll be a wasteland when we're done with it, Tom. Rest assured. When do we launch?" Wolfson asked.

"I'm going to issue the 'go' orders as soon as I hang up with you," Gates informed him. "Plan to have your ordnance over the target in one hour forty minutes."

"One hundred minutes, wilco." They each disconnected the call.

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Bill Mitchum stuck his hand out to meet Vincent Marriner's. "Mr. Prime Minister, this is a great honor both for me and for the Republic of Texas. Welcome to Austin, and welcome to Texas."

"Please call me 'Vincent', Governor. I expect we'll be talking very frankly tonight, and I do not wish to stand on formality. There is a time for rigid protocol, and this isn't it."

"Then you should know that all my friends — and I hope that includes you — call me 'Bill'." Mitchum put his arm around Marriner and led him toward the lounge.

When they were comfortably seated, Mitchum broke the ice: "Vincent, forgive me for being blunt, but are you here on your own mission or at the behest of someone else?" They both understood who the 'someone else' would be.

"Bill, I'm here strictly on behalf of Canada. No one has sent me to you except my own desire to see that no harm comes to Canada or its people. I'm an agent strictly for Canada. Since we're being blunt, let me brief you on sentiment to the north.

"We Canadians are quite worried that this tiff between our brothers to the South could easily turn into something much more serious, and that could have negative repercussions for Canada. I have to add that the actions of those on your side, 'the breakaways' we call you, seizing military bases and so on, have made that much more likely. I'm here to find out what, if anything, Canada can do to quiet things down between your 'breakaways' and the rest of your country. Tell me, Bill, what can we do to help?"

"Vincent, the actions we have taken were not taken lightly. We — all of us — feel that our country is being taken away from us. The issue of 'guns' is really peripheral to a larger and much more important issue: individual sovereignty. I suspect that Canadians on the whole must scratch their heads at our attitude, but we consider that 'every man a king' is actually the way it should be. We citizens have allowed the federal government — which is really nothing more than an agent for the States — to do all sorts of things because it seemed like those things would bring more benefit than harm. Things like creating a Department of Education at the federal level. There's not a stitch of authority granted to the federal government to do such a thing, but we

said 'our children's education is important enough that we shouldn't let our innate stubbornness get in its way', and we let the Department of Education come into being. There are hundreds of federal agencies that fit that bill, but none of them ever threatened, directly, the Bill of Rights, so we put our worries aside and tried to go along to get along. This latest incursion is simply the straw that broke the camel's back, and we're not going to let it pass this time. We were perfectly content to roll the dice having taken every legal advantage we could. Those others were not content to suffer us any advantages. For them, this is a win-at-all-costs maneuver. Unfortunately for them, it has shown them to be thoroughly unprincipled and opposed to the Rule of Law. We have always been aware of it. Now everyone knows. We are the injured party here, Vincent. If you want to help the situation, you should be sitting down with Doug Farnham and the Congressional leaders and making them aware of the hurt they have done."

"Bill," Marriner soothed, "at this very moment my Foreign Minister is giving exactly that message to President Farnham. It's possible that his message will go unheeded, so I've come here to see if at least one side in this dispute can be convinced to make overtures of amity. Am I talking to the right person, Bill?"

Mitchum didn't say anything immediately. He looked like he was considering the proposal. He rose quickly, stepped to the door of the lounge, and called his secretary:

"Joyce, please set up a conference call with the other governors right away. I'll be on the speakerphone in the lounge. Let me know when it's ready."

Having already done this twice today and four other times in the last week, Joyce was becoming quite the expert. It helped, of course, to have a list of numbers on her speed-dialer used for no purpose other than to allow one governor to speak with another instantly. As a result, it was a near-certainty the phone would ring when dialed. In a matter of minutes, all 13 governors were hooked together for another conference.

"Friends," Bill Mitchum started, using the form of address he always used for this group, "I have here with me tonight Prime Minister Vincent Marriner of Canada. The Prime Minister has come to ask me, and therefore us, whether we will... well, let me have Vincent explain it. Mr. Prime Minister?"

Marriner cleared his throat and started: "I have come here — sent by my government, if you will — to try to calm things down. We, your neighbors to the north, look at the preparations for war happening just across the border, and we worry — not just for us, but for you. We cannot see any outcome for the events now taking place here that will not seriously damage everyone in North America. If you

and your brothers come to blows, Canada will certainly suffer, even if we manage not to be drawn into war. We will suffer because your economies will suffer, and ours is inextricably tied to yours. Things will never be the same, and not solely because very many people will die. We Canadians wish you well, all of you, and that includes those whose actions have pushed you over the edge. We want to see — we're desperate to see — an amicable end to hostilities. With that end in mind, I have sent my Foreign Minister, René Lalouche, to Washington to make the same proposal to President Farnham. I don't yet know the outcome of that trip, but I have the utmost confidence in René. Regardless of that, however, I am here to ask you whether you will take the initiative to offer President Farnham a peaceful solution to this dispute. I'm asking you to put your pride aside, if that's what's necessary, to give Farnham every opportunity to work through to a peaceful solution."

Aboard the Vicksburg, which had moved 150 miles closer in the last nearly five hours, five Tomahawks sat on their launch rails waiting for the right moment. Fifty miles off Galveston, the seconds ticked by while the onboard targeting computers calculated distance and flight time and solved for time-over-target. At 0112 ZULU, the fire control officer signaled his skipper: "Birds one through four are cycling up. Launch in 30 seconds." Thirty seconds later, the four Tomahawks, one by one, blasted off into the dusk bearing northwest. Two minutes later, the fifth Tomahawk followed them.

Constance Broadley was the first to speak. "Mr. Prime Minister —"

Marriner cut her short: "Governor, let's not be so formal. Governor Mitchum and I are already on a first-name basis. I would be pleased if all of you would call me 'Vincent'. I think we might as well get used to increased familiarity because this joint effort is going to bring us very close to one another." *And a little extra familiarity*, he thought to himself, *certainly can't hurt*.

"Well, then, Mr. Prime Minister... Vincent, allow me to be completely candid. I have never seen so many people ready to take up arms as I have seen in the past few days. Some of us wondered when we took this precipitous step whether we might wind up on the gallows as ordinary traitors. I'm now convinced the vast majority of Montanans — I can't speak for other states — were simply waiting for anything that looked like leadership. I can say without fear of contradiction that Montana is not amenable to surrender. I do recognize, however, that it would be better for all concerned — for us even more than for you — were this to conclude without bloodshed.

On that basis alone, I, personally, support your call for us to extend an olive branch. I may be thrown out of office tomorrow for saying this, but I'm ready to go for it." None of the other Governors spoke against the proposal even if one or two were not entirely comfortable with it.

"Vincent, this is Buddy Tyler in Arizona. I'd like to clarify a few points if I may —"

In Austin, Joyce burst into Mitchum's lounge and interrupted. "Governor, we have an air raid warning. Will you please go to the shelter right away, sir?"

Mitchum barked into the phone: "We'll talk to you guys later. We're under attack." He, Joyce, and Vincent Marriner headed for the stairs.

On the phone, which had not been hung up and disconnected, a babble of voices demanded to know what was going on. There was no longer anyone in Austin to tell them. Everyone was hurrying to shelter. With Mitchum and Marriner only steps away from safety the Tomahawk targeting the Texas Capitol leveled the Governor's mansion killing everyone who had not already sheltered behind blast-proof walls.

As the missiles streaked over Houston, alarm bells all over Texas started ringing. At Dyess AFB outside of Abilene, Texas Air National Guard crews raced to their planes and took flight. All but two B1-Bs got airborne before four cruise missiles obliterated the base.

Aboard "Bone Breaker", the lead B1-B, Colonel Edmund Fannin (who claimed to be related to an earlier, more famous Fannin) swung his plane and his squadron southeast. The only information he had was 'they came from the southeast', so he was going to see what might have sent them. An AWACS based near Corpus Christi was also angling toward Galveston and listening intently.

Aboard Vicksburg, Signals was receiving a live feed from a reconnaissance satellite showing four large heat plumes at Dyess, the blast effects from the missiles, and several smaller, mobile plumes moving away from the area. This they interpreted to mean that some of the aircraft from Dyess had escaped destruction. There was no need to report it. The White House already knew. Vicksburg and her battle group had turned southeast as soon as the missiles were launched and were steaming away at top speed.

There is no practical way for a surface ship to escape a pursuing aircraft. Vicksburg's only hope was that there would be no pursuit or that anything chasing them would not be able to find them on a very large patch of water. The presence of an AWACS made that a vain hope. Thirty-five minutes after the first siren started wailing at Dyess, five B1-Bs weaved their way through a thicket of anti-aircraft missiles and began dumping their JDAM precision guided munitions.

All the bombs dropped were directed to spots along the waterlines of the cruiser and its three escorts. Within five minutes of starting the attack, all four ships were stopped with their engines now disabled. Two of the escorts had rolled, the third was on fire and listing badly. Vicksburg was low in the water, and its crew was abandoning ship. The B1-Bs turned toward Kelly AFB, their new home, reactivated a bare three days ago.

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Farnham's Chief of Staff waved at the President to get his attention. "Mr. President, Minister Lalouche is on the phone. He says it's most urgent."

"We're at war, Bob. Take a message." Farnham was disinclined to give Lalouche the time of day after his back-stabbing performance earlier in the day.

Bob Danner returned to the phone and spoke to René Lalouche: "Minister Lalouche, the President is unable to take your call because of the events of the last hour. He is engaged with his advisers. May he return this call when things settle down?"

"I will be leaving Washington within the hour, returning to Ottawa. Possibly he'll be able to reach me there at the Foreign Office."

"I'll make sure the President receives this information," Danner assured him. "Is there anything else you would like me to pass along to the President when he's free?"

"No, Bob," Lalouche sounded quite sad. "I don't think your President needs more bad news at the moment." He hung up. Within minutes, Lalouche was in a limousine headed for the airport. His pilot had been alerted and the engines of the Embraer were warmed and ready for takeoff the moment he arrived. At the Canadian Embassy, codebooks and sensitive documents went up in smoke.

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In the anteroom to Buddy Tyler's office, a TV was always tuned to CNN with the volume muted. This allowed his secretary/aide to monitor breaking stories, and she was expected to notify the Governor if anything appeared that seemed important. She now had her eyes glued to the screen and her patience was amply rewarded. She buzzed Tyler and informed him: "CNN, sir."

Tyler raised the volume on his TV and watched. Brad Swanson had a worried look on his face. "The Capitol District is in flames and firefighters from outlying counties are here to help control the fires. We've just received word from the Canadian Consulate in

Houston that Prime Minister Vincent Marriner may have been here visiting Governor Mitchum when a single missile — probably a cruise missile of the Tomahawk variety — impacted here in downtown. We have no word yet on casualties, but from the looks of the buildings surrounding me, I think we should expect a large number. We also have had no word from the Governor's Office on the condition of the Governor and Prime Minister Marriner, and it may be that they are both casualties in what appears to be the opening salvo of the next War Between The States.

"In the skies overhead can be heard the roar of jet engines as Air National Guard fighters patrol the area looking for threats. In other parts of Texas and throughout the breakaway states, we have reports of heavy military activity. For more on this, we go now to Lisa Guttierrez in San Antonio. Lisa?"

The video picked up their correspondent in San Antonio: "Brad, I have been talking with Major Thomas from the Texas Air National Guard, and he was pretty busy, as you can imagine, but he managed to give me a quick 'read' on the activity tonight. According to Major Thomas, there were air-to-air combat actions over every base in the San Antonio area. Apparently, a large force of aircraft were dispatched to invade and re-occupy the bases seized just four days ago by National Guard units in the ten western states. Large military transports: C-130s and C-5s, we're told, accompanied by fighter cover, appeared overhead at precisely 7:38 PM, San Antonio time. At Kelly AFB, not far from where I am right now, two C-5s attempted to land troops. Apparently the first C-5 was shot down just inside the base perimeter, and is still burning —" The camera panned to show a glow in the near-distance. "— and the second was unable to land. I have no word on the fate of that second transport, but there are scattered reports of many aircraft crashes due to combat damage. We do not yet have a count of casualties on either side, but it appears that all the bases in San Antonio remain in the hands of the Texas Guard."

The anchor in Atlanta broke in. "Lisa, thanks. We're going now to Malmstrom AFB near Great Falls Montana and our correspondent, Betty Gordon. Betty?" The camera picked up a shivering Betty Gordon with snowflakes swirling around her parka-clad head.

"The situation here in Montana is much more calm. Malmstrom is a hotbed of missile technology, and tonight the Guard units at the base got a chance to show what's in their arsenal. It turns out this isn't just 'Minuteman Central', but has an impressive collection of other types of guided weaponry, too. No aircraft have been able to penetrate into Montana from the east beyond Billings. We have reports from as far out as Fort Peck Lake of aircraft down including one

transport — we don't know what type — down in the lake. With the weather as bad as it's been the past few days, it's unlikely there will be any survivors from that crash.

"No ICBMs have launched, and speculation is starting that the guard units may not have the launch codes for the silos. If that's true, Malmstrom's importance to the secessionists fades almost to insignificance. It may also be true that this invasion, which seems to lack the flair we've come to associate with General Wilfred Tobias, may never have risen to the point of being a genuine threat. Certainly heads will roll in Washington tonight for this botched operation, and Tobias will undoubtedly take much of the blame. Back to you, Brad."

—==+++==—

"Marriner went to Austin? Why didn't Lalouche say so?" Farnham asked.

"I'm trying to find that out as we speak, Mr. President. Lalouche is still in transit to Ottawa, according to the Foreign Office, and we have no way of reaching him until he lands. State has ordered our ambassador to meet his plane. I'm afraid that's not all the bad news, though."

"Oh, no?" Farnham inquired. "What else can go wrong tonight?"

"CBC is reporting that Parliament has been called to attend an emergency session. If we're very lucky, it's just to choose a new PM."

"I can tell you we're not going to be that lucky," Farnham snapped. "Parliament doesn't get to choose the new PM. The majority party does that, and Lalouche is probably in the running. The PM also gets to decide when Canada goes to war, and Lalouche already thinks of me a scheming back-stabbing hypocrite, exactly my appraisal of him a scant two hours ago. No, I suspect whoever the new PM is, that person is going to consult with Parliament so that responsibility for the decision to go to war with us won't fall completely on his head. I think we need to be prepared for a very unpleasant road ahead."

"I'll summon your cabinet."

—==+++==—

As the prisoners marched toward Malmstrom's mess hall, one of them stepped out of line and approached one of the guards. Three rifles swiveled to put him in their sights. "I want to talk to the CO," he told the guard.

"You son of a bitch!" one of the other prisoners snarled at him. Another made a leap toward the first prisoner and only stopped when his path was blocked by a shiny bayonet.

"What do you want to talk to the CO about?" the Guardsman asked.

"Launch codes." The Guardsman motioned him to lead the way and followed the prisoner 4 meters behind him. They crossed to the Administration building where the prisoner was joined by two more rifle-toting soldiers. Together they went to the CO's office and informed his aide that this prisoner had information about launch codes.

The group entered Colonel Rod Calhoun's office and the prisoner was directed to sit. "What's this I hear about launch codes?" the Colonel asked

"Sir," the Captain began, "I'm a Texan. I have to admit I was adamant about not divulging any secret material to anyone, but the news I just heard is giving me second thoughts. Sir, is it true that Austin has been attacked?"

"Yes, son, Austin was hit by at least one Tomahawk fired from offshore. At the moment, we believe Governor Mitchum is KIA. It looks like they also got the Canadian PM at the same time. Dyess was hit by three or more Tomahawks and is no longer operating, but it appears most of their aircraft survived."

"Well, Colonel, it looks to me like everybody in Washington has gone crazy. I don't see that I have any obligation to honor a promise to certifiable nut-cases. Their actions put them on the wrong side, and I'm not going to stay there with them. I have access to the launch codes and, if it becomes necessary, I'll unlock the silos."

"Do I understand you correctly? Are you going to give us the launch codes?" Calhoun asked him.

"No, sir. I said I would unlock the silos if it becomes necessary. I'm reserving to myself the determination of necessity."

"I'd much rather you gave us the codes, Captain," Calhoun told him.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure you would, but I'm not sure that would be a good idea for either of us."

"Fair enough," Calhoun finished.

7 - Oh, Canada

René Lalouche stepped to the speaker's podium. The lights in the chamber and the darkness beyond the windows gave the scene the eerie quality reserved for those occasions when Parliament met at night. Lalouche plopped a folder onto the lectern and the sound echoed through a hall so silent there might have been no one there. He flipped the folder open and glanced around the room at all the upturned faces. He had 100 percent of their attention.

"I want to give you all an update on the events of this night," he began as if anyone here actually needed a briefing. "The Prime Minister is presumed a casualty in a pre-emptive missile attack this evening on the Texas Statehouse and environs. At the same time, the —" He paused, not knowing precisely how to name it. The formerly-United States were now the disunited-States. It seemed inappropriate to use the term for either side. "At the same time, Washington launched a multi-pronged attack aimed at recovering control of several critical military bases now in the hands of the breakaway states. We have no good intelligence on the effort, but preliminary estimates are that the breakaways have managed to retain control of most if not all of the bases they seized last week.

"My party has asked me to assume the Prime Minister's duties until such time as we can determine with certainty Vincent Marriner's fate, and I have asked you all to attend me tonight as the Prime Minister pro tem. As 'acting PM', I don't feel it within my authority to take the country to war, although when I finish briefing you, you will understand why I feel it might be necessary.

"I met earlier today in Washington with President Farnham and expressed to him Canada's desire for a non-violent solution to their problems. I found the President quite cold and distant but attributed this to the fact that he is quite preoccupied with pressing matters. He encouraged me to make the same plea for a non-violent solution to the breakaways and I assured him that was being taken care of. He assured me that Washington would not fire the first shot and I trusted him to keep his word. Had he given me any hint that he was planning to attack this very night —" He turned away to force himself to regain control. All in the chamber understood that this was an emotional time, for Lalouche was not simply Vincent Marriner's Foreign Minister. They were also long-time friends. He turned back to face the assembly. "That is, the President of the United States looked into the eyes of their closest ally and lied to us about their plans. I am

distressed. I am disgusted. We are not being treated as allies. We are being treated as spies and enemies, and their paranoia has now cost us one of the finest statesmen our country has produced in a generation. Gentlemen, ladies, it is now almost a certainty we shall be drawn into the conflict to the south. We can wait and have war thrust upon us, or we can ride out and meet it. Whichever, we shall have to choose upon which side we shall ally. That is why you are here tonight. I do not demand that we go to war, since that is all but a foregone conclusion. I ask that you consider the matter and advise me as to when, and under what circumstances, we shall take up the sword, and on whose side." He stood down from the podium in a gesture that clearly said: *'Any who wish to speak, do so.'*

Edgar Gilchrist, a delegate from Alberta, rose and approached the lectern. "I wish to ascertain from the acting PM whether he is certain President Farnham knew the whereabouts of Prime Minister Marriner from his conversation with the President?"

Lalouche looked back at him blankly for a few moments, then fetched his cell phone from his pocket and speed-dialed the Embassy in Washington. The switchboard operator connected him immediately with the ambassador, the only other person Lalouche knew to be party to his discussion with Farnham.

"Ralph," Lalouche begged him, "did I say, explicitly, that Marriner had gone to Austin when I was talking with the President?"

"René, I'm fairly certain you did not make that clear," the ambassador told him. "I distinctly recall being surprised later, after the bombing had started, that you were worried for Vincent's safety. It was only then that I realized the PM had gone to Texas. Is there a problem?"

Lalouche stood to answer Gilchrist's question. "The Ambassador was with us when I spoke to Farnham. The ambassador does not recall hearing me tell Farnham that the PM had gone to Austin. Let me correct that: the ambassador feels that I did not specify that, and that Farnham was, therefore, unaware our PM was with Governor Mitchum. I suppose I ought to add that Farnham has been trying to reach me for some time now, and I have been avoiding speaking with him until I could consult with Parliament." He sat down.

"Perhaps, Minister," Gilchrist finished, "you ought to take that call now."

Lalouche dialed his office and spoke with his secretary: "Mary, is President Farnham still trying to reach me?"

"Oh, yes, Minister," she assured him. "They call every fifteen minutes or so, and several times they've left a direct call-back number. Shall I place the call, Minister?"

"Yes, please do, and connect it to my cell phone."

Within a minute, Lalouche, now in a private office off to one side of the parliamentary floor, was connected to Washington. Farnham began speaking almost at once.

"Minister Lalouche," Farnham began, "it's critical that no precipitous action be taken at this moment." Lalouche was quite taken aback by this. Farnham's precipitous actions had pushed Canada to the brink of war, but now avoiding such action was 'critical'? "I can't begin to express to you and the people of Canada how devastated we are over your Prime Minister," Farnham continued, while Lalouche grew angrier by the minute over his obvious hypocrisy. "If only you had told me your Prime Minister was in Austin —"

Lalouche cut him off: "Indeed, President Farnham, it would have saved us a great deal of grief, but that is as they say 'water under the bridge'. Your precipitous actions have left us all in a very different position than we had this morning. It would also have saved us grief had you been more honest about your plans for a pre-emptive attack on a non-military target, the Texas Statehouse. Instead, you lied to your closest ally. I can hardly wait to hear what excuse you might have for that, Mr. President. Perhaps I ought to invite you to Ottawa to explain to Parliament why you felt it necessary to deceive me." Lalouche paused to let Farnham answer.

Farnham, for his part, was growing more depressed by the minute. He realized that he was screwing up on a more-or-less regular basis, first alienating several of the Governors, then General Tobias, and now Canada's Foreign Minister and soon-to-be Prime Minister. There were certainly others he wasn't even aware of yet.

"Minister Lalouche, I recognize how badly I have treated you and others over the past week. I cannot begin to tell you how sorry I am for my own precipitous actions. Minister Lalouche, our situation here is quite grave, and I have been making poor decisions. I admit it. I ask you, in the spirit of the friendship our countries have shared for over two hundred years, tell me what I must do to atone for this."

Lalouche had not expected this: an admission of guilt and an apparent resolve to make things right. It didn't cool his anger... much, but it is hard for anyone to reject true penitence. He thought for a few moments, and Farnham did not interrupt

"President Farnham," Lalouche began at last, "your credibility on the world stage has been nearly destroyed. Almost nothing you do now will be accepted — widely — as sincere. I think you ought to resign, Mr. President."

Now it was Farnham's turn to be surprised. He had expected a much more conciliatory attitude from Lalouche. This made Lalouche the fourth person in six days to suggest Farnham's presidency was a failure. Resign? He couldn't do that! The country was in a crisis

unprecedented since 1865. If he resigned now, the country would be fragmented beyond repair. The United States' influence throughout the world would shrink to insignificance. Farnham would not let that happen on his watch.

"I'll take that under advisement, Minister Lalouche. Tell me, if you can: is Canada at war with us?"

"Not yet, Mr. President," Lalouche carefully avoided the suggestion that that could change within minutes.

"Are you Canada's new PM?" Farnham probed.

"Acting," Lalouche confirmed.

"Then, Mister Prime Minister, let me assure you of the everlasting friendship of the United States and my personal hope that nothing gets in the way of our historic bonds. Good night, Mr. Prime Minister."

"Good night, Mr. President." The line dropped.

Lalouche strolled back onto the debating floor and into the middle of a typical exchange. A delegate from Nova Scotia was calling for calm, rational discourse and was being shouted at for his troubles. "Gentlemen, be reasonable! For over two hundred years we have been at peace with our neighbor to the south, often fighting shoulder-to-shoulder in foreign wars. Ought we not, even on this terrible occasion, give them the benefit of the doubt? We all make mistakes. President Farnham is not immune, not protected from error. Let us, at least, hear what they have to say in their own defense before condemning them. Is that not how you would wish them to treat us were the circumstances reversed?"

René sauntered back toward the podium and the room quieted for him. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to know what had transpired between him and Farnham.

"I have just spoken with President Farnham," he addressed the hushed crowd. "The President recognizes the seriousness of the situation into which he has thrust us and has apologized — profusely — for what he admits are bad decisions. He expressed his desire that his mistakes would not damage the historic friendship between our nations, and he asked what he might do by way of atonement. I suggested that his departure from the Presidency would be appropriate." There was a smattering of applause. "The President did not reject the suggestion out-of-hand, and I consider that a good sign. It's evidence that he may not be as crazy as some of us believe. Nevertheless, it's only a sign. I intend to wait until his actions show the depth of his contrition."

A delegate from Quebec rose and spoke: "Minister, would it not be a good idea to alert our armed forces? Farnham has already shown himself to be unstable and unpredictable. We would be remiss

in our duties were we not to be prepared for the worst." There followed a murmur of approval from the floor. "In addition," the delegate continued, "it might be wise to move troops closer to the border — just in case."

Lalouche nodded to the delegate and turned to speak to his... to Vincent Marriner's secretary, one of the few in the chamber this evening who was not an MP. What passed between them was inaudible, but the secretary nodded and jotted some notes.

"Is there a consensus in the chamber as regards the course we ought to pursue?" he asked, but the response was barely more than muttering.

The delegate from Quebec who had spoken earlier took this as an invitation and rose once more. "I firmly believe we should prepare for war. It may not come to that, but if it does, and we are not prepared many of our countrymen will suffer for it. Mr. Prime Minister," he addressed René as if it were true, "you must alert the army and reinforce the border." Applause erupted in the chamber, enough that Lalouche felt confident he at last knew the sense of Parliament.

"Well," Lalouche continued after the applause had died down, "I think that we are of one mind in this matter. I will put our armed forces on full alert and have them be ready should there be any incursion by troops. Since the hour is now quite late, I release you with the hope that things will look much more pleasant in the light of day. Goodnight, gentlemen, and thank you for your counsel." He stepped down and left the chamber followed closely by the PM's secretary.

"Call Kirsten O'Dwyer," he told the secretary as they walked down the hallway. "I want to consult with her before moving troops."

By the time they got to the PM's office, which Lalouche was occupying for the duration, the receptionist had the DDO waiting on the line. Lalouche picked up the desk phone and pushed the button for line 1. "Kirsten, I'm sorry for calling you so late."

"That's not a problem, Prime Minister." *Ah*, Lalouche thought, *she's staying on top of things.*

"Kirsten, I need a quick off-the-top-of-your-head 'read' on something I'm about to do." Kirsten O'Dwyer said nothing, but inside her head alarms were ringing. "Parliament wants the armed forces on alert and the border reinforced."

"Mr. Prime Minister, you can't do that." She sounded worried.

"Why not?" Lalouche demanded.

"Farnham will know within minutes — not even hours — that troops are on the move. He may consider it an act of war. If you feel

you must do it, I advise you to call Farnham and assure him it's all just precautionary."

"I'll do that, Kirsten. Thank you for your cool head."

"My pleasure, Minister." and then Lalouche hung up.

"Mary," Lalouche called to the outer office, "get me General Lindquist, and be ready to place a call to the White House immediately afterwards."

It took Mary almost three minutes to connect with General Lindquist, then she buzzed the PM's desk phone. "General Lindquist, line 1."

Lalouche could almost hear the General snap to attention as René began to speak: "General, at the urging of Parliament, I want all active duty forces on full alert. I want our troops to be prepared to repel an invasion from the south."

"From everything in the south, sir?" Lindquist asked.

"No," René spoke slowly and thoughtfully, "North Dakota and east." Now that he thought about it, neither Montana nor Idaho seemed like much of a threat, and Washington State had already taken a public position of neutrality, refusing to be drawn into what they called 'a squabble among brothers'. "You probably don't have to worry about Vermont, either."

"The orders will go out within the hour, Minister." *Someone will have to open the library at the War College,* Lindquist thought after his PM had hung up. That might be the only place to find plans for defending against the United States... among its more esoteric papers. Certainly there were no active plans that he knew of.

"White House on line 2, sir." Mary informed him.

Lalouche snatched the phone off the hook to hear a voice assure him "The President will be with you in a moment, Mr. Prime Minister." It seemed as if only seconds passed before Farnham spoke into his phone: "Is everything still alright, Mr. Prime Minister?"

"Yes, Mr. President, everything is alright, but I have news for you: at the urging of Parliament, Canadian forces have gone on alert and are being moved closer to the border. I'm sure you will receive word of this through ordinary channels shortly, and I wanted you to hear it from me rather than from your NSA."

"Is this something I should worry about, Minister?" Farnham probed.

"It should not cause you to lose a wink of sleep," Lalouche assured him. "Parliament is merely being over-cautious. As long as U.S. troops do not cross the border, it will be a non-event."

"That sounds very much like a threat, Mr. Lalouche." Farnham deliberately dropped René's title and the change was not lost on the Canadian.

"President Farnham, I assure you it is merely a precaution. That is all the 'news' I have for you tonight, and the hour is late. Good night, Mr. President." René disconnected without waiting to hear whether Farnham wished him a similar good night.

General Gates entered the Oval Office and saluted his President. Farnham looked up expectantly. "Canadian troops are moving south toward the border from almost as far west as Regina — that's in Saskatchewan — all the way to New Brunswick. They seem to be reinforcing the border only as far west as the Dakotas."

"So they're not reinforcing above Montana?" Farnham asked.

"Apparently not," Gates responded. "That's not to say they won't do so later today or tomorrow, but there's no surveillance evidence of it right now."

"They're defending against us."

"So far, no one else has killed any of their high government officials," Gates explained. Farnham just glared at him.

"What's the likelihood this is the start of an attack by them across our border?" Farnham asked distractedly.

"Near zero," Gates replied. "Their army is nowhere near the size of ours. That, and the fact they'd be fighting on foreign soil, puts them at a severe disadvantage. There's nothing to worry about."

"That's what Lalouche assured me last night, General, but I still worry. We could be surrounded before we know it."

"Mr. President," Gates pleaded, "we have the largest, best-equipped armed forces in the history of the world. No one is going to go up against us if they have any choice in the matter."

"All the same, eleven major — eleven critical — military bases are no longer part of our armed forces. I'd feel safer if we had some assets arrayed along the border, just in case."

"Shall I order troops moved home from the Middle East?" Gates asked.

"What about reserves?" Farnham scolded.

"OK," Gates continued, "I can swing troops up from the western border with the break-away states, but that will leave precious little in the way of manpower if they make an incursion."

"No," Farnham's tone was one of exasperation. "Aren't there troops we haven't sent west?"

"No, Mr. President," Gates patiently explained, "we're using everyone who has been activated. There isn't any more. If you want to open a new front, you'll have to close an existing campaign down first."

"What will we do if the Canadians cross the border?"

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it, shall we, Mr. President?" Farnham just nodded.

A convoy of Canadian Light Armored Vehicles — LAVs — barreled south from Regina on route 6, then swung southeast onto route 39 toward Weyburn. Fifty kilometers later the bulk of them split off and headed dead south on route 35 toward their assigned positions south of Oungre, Saskatchewan. Another fifty kilometers further on another group split off toward their posts south of Estevan while the remainder headed east on route 18. When route 39 branched off bearing southeast, Lieutenant Kenneth Pinkham waved goodbye to his comrades and swung onto 39 bound for North Portal, Saskatchewan, on the U.S. border. His single LAV, he knew, wouldn't last a moment against what the United States could throw at them, but their job was not to *stop* an invasion. Their job was to *report* an invasion. They were to swing around North Portal and set up an observation post east of the town where activity on US 52 could be observed from a distance.

When route 39 took a small bend to the northeast, the LAV's driver believed he had transited to the local road through the north end of town. In fact, he was still on 39 and because the sun had just started to color the eastern sky, the absence of people on the street gave him no clue that he was on the wrong road.

Traveling at 75mph, the LAV blew through North Portal and right past the U.S. Customs and Immigration checkpoint where US 52 became Saskatchewan 39. As soon as he realized what he had done, Corporal Jennings stood on his brakes until they smoked. The shriek of his brakes roused the US Customs agent from the dream he had been enjoying and he rushed onto the street to see what was the cause of all the noise. By this time, Jennings had brought the LAV to a stop and was frantically trying to get it into reverse so he could back it across the border. When the LAV's white back-up lights came on, the Customs guard assumed he was about to be run over, drew his pistol, and opened fire on the LAV now headed straight for him. Lieutenant Pinkham returned fire with the submachine gun he had drawn especially for this assignment. He didn't hit the guard, but he forced the guard to take cover by diving back inside the building. Jennings managed to get the LAV aimed back the way he originally came and, in just seconds, they had returned to Canada. The damage, however, was already done.

Inside the Customs shack, the guard, his hands still trembling from all the adrenaline coursing through his system, dialed the number for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Washington, DC. The call was taken by a sleepy operator — *thank God it doesn't go to one*

of those damned voice-prompts, he thought: *'press 1 to get information on customs allowances, press 2 to report an invasion...'* — and the guard started spouting the instant he realized he was connected.

"This is Agent Tony Palladino at Portal, North Dakota," he screamed into the mouthpiece. "The Canadians are invading!"

It took the operator a few seconds to understand what Palladino was trying to say. "Invading?" she asked.

"Yes, invading," Palladino confirmed. "A Canadian armored vehicle crossed the border and they fired on me."

"Where are they now?" the operator asked starting to jot notes.

"They ran back across the border. I shot at them and they ran back into Canada."

The operator thought: *this doesn't sound like much of an invasion*, but decided to press for more information. "Are you sure they were Canadian?"

"Well who the hell else would they be with a great big red maple leaf painted on the side of their truck?" Palladino screamed back at the idiot 1600 miles away. "Alert somebody! We've got to stop them!"

"I'll pass it on. Stay cool and don't try to defend the border single-handed. Help is on the way," the operator assured him. Palladino hung up and started breaking out the heavy weapons stored in the vault.

In Regina, a phone started ringing. The commandant whose troops were now splayed across the border with North Dakota picked it up and listened to the report coming in from a detached unit in North Portal. After a few sentences he already had his head in his hands. "Oh, wonderful!"

8 - The Dogs of War

"Mr. President," the aide informed Farnham, "General Gates on line one."

Farnham picked up the phone immediately. "Yes, General?"

"Mr. President," Gates began, "it appears you were right about the Canadians. We have a report of an incursion over the border by Canadian armored vehicles —"

"That god-damned little slimeball," Farnham cut Gates off, "and he had the nerve to call me 'dishonest'! What are we doing about this, Gates?"

"I've ordered units from the First Air Cavalry to swing northeast to reinforce the border," Gates assured the President, "and they will be reinforced by Airborne within a few hours. The cavalry has plenty of firepower on their gunships to handle most of what the Canadians can move south, and the jumpers will handle the rest." *I hope*, he added silently to himself. "The border east of the Dakotas is very weak. We have virtually all of our manpower deployed along the western frontier. There's nothing left if the Canadians decide to push along the entire line. We may be forced to go nuclear if they do. Perhaps this would be a good time to give the Canucks a warning?"

"I'll call Lalouche as soon as you're done, General."

"I'm done now, Mr. President. There's very little I can tell you beyond what I've already said. We've got to stay loose. I'm playing this by ear."

"OK," Farnham agreed. "Take whatever actions you think are necessary." Farnham hung up the phone and bellowed for someone to 'get that son-of-a-bitch Lalouche on the line'.

It didn't take long. Lalouche's... Marriner's secretary recognized the importance of the call and buzzed her Prime Minister: "President Farnham for you, Prime Minister."

At this point, Lalouche had not yet received word of the incursion into North Dakota and was completely unprepared for Farnham's verbal assault.

"Lalouche, you lying scumbag," Farnham began without even waiting for Lalouche to announce himself, "You set me up! If you think you can get away with this, you've got another think coming!"

"Mr. President," Lalouche interrupted, trying to regain his verbal footing, "what are you talking about? I have no idea what you think I'm trying to 'get away with'." Lalouche looked up to see the

secretary in the doorway waving frantically at him. He ignored her. "At least bring me up to speed on what's troubling you."

"Don't tell me you have no idea Canadian forces have invaded U.S. territory. Orders to cross the border must have originated in your office," Farnham screamed at Lalouche.

"I assure you no such order has originated here, President Farnham," Lalouche stuck his foot in the conversational door. "Canadian troops are on the border, yes, but they have not been authorized to cross it. Tell me where you think our forces have intruded and I'll —"

"Prime Minister," the secretary intruded, butting into Lalouche's telephone conversation, "this is most urgent. Lieutenant-General Carrington reports that one of his units has accidentally crossed into North Dakota. He insists on speaking with you without delay, Minister."

Lalouche's face had gone white as the blood drained away from it. "President Farnham, it appears you are at least partially right. I have just received a report from the field describing an accidental incursion. Mr. President, give me five minutes to find out what's going on and I promise I'll have the full, accurate recounting for you in that time."

"Five minutes," Farnham confirmed and disconnected.

Lalouche picked up the second call and announced himself: "Lalouche."

"Prime Minister," Lieutenant-General Carrington began immediately, "I regret to inform you that there has been an accidental incursion by one of our LAVs at North Portal into Portal, North Dakota. The American guard at the border fired on our unit — one can hardly blame him — and our troops returned fire."

"Any casualties?"

"Our boys say none of them were hit and they believe the American guard was also undamaged, but they didn't stay around long enough to make sure."

"Who fired first?" Lalouche demanded.

"The Americans fired first. That was my first question, too, Minister. We were, however, at the time on foreign soil, so we can hardly complain."

"I have to tell you, General, that I was getting an earful from the American President when your call came in. He's very upset, and lately he's been acting on his worst impulses. I need your most realistic appraisal of the situation right now, General. I'm out of time."

"Prime Minister, as far as we can tell there are few if any American troops on the border, so our boys are relatively safe for the time being. That situation can change very quickly, and I have to tell

you that the Americans can throw quite a lot of devastation our way if they so choose. I think we need to go to 'red alert' to be ready for exactly that eventuality."

"I agree, General. Let's pull our boys back a few miles, at least, and get some reconnaissance aircraft to watch the border for signs of an invasion. And make god-damned sure those aircraft stay on our side of the fence."

"Yes, Prime Minister."

Southwest of Rapid City, SD, the First Cavalry was preparing to attack a pocket of Wyoming Guard deployed east of Casper when orders arrived to pull back and redeploy along the North Dakota border with Canada. "Canada!" one officer snorted, "Which asshole is trying to open a second front when we can barely cope with one?"

"This came direct from Gates, himself," the colonel confirmed. "Something bad must be happening."

"Then we're screwed big time," the first snapped back. "Without the cav, there's nothing to prevent the Wyoming Guard pushing through."

"Ours not to reason why; ours but to do and die."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"Well, if you're afraid of dying, you're in the wrong business," his colonel observed glumly.

Farnham's phone burred and he snapped it out of the cradle. "Farnham."

"President Farnham," Lalouche jumped right in, "I've just gotten off the phone with the officer in charge of the Canadian forces on the border, and he confirms that one of our armored vehicles did, in fact, cross into North Dakota, and I assure you that it was entirely unintentional. There also appears to have been shots fired, and the report I received said the American fired first. I'm not blaming him or you for that. He was, after all, defending against what he thought was an invasion and he was, certainly in his own mind, entirely justified. You will hear no complaints from me on that issue."

"Your troops also fired on our border guard," Farnham interjected. "Are you aware of that?"

"I was aware of that. What I understand was that your guard was undamaged. Is that so?"

"I don't know," Farnham admitted. "I don't have a report on him."

"Well, let me extend my best wishes for his continued good health, and assure you that you have not witnessed an invasion as the term is commonly understood. What happened tonight was an

accidental incursion by a unit that got too lost too near the border, and our plans are that it will not be repeated. I've been doing most of the talking so far, Mr. President. I'd like to hear your thoughts now."

Farnham was slightly taken-aback. He hadn't been prepared for such a conciliatory tone from Lalouche. All of his preparations had been for conflict with his Canadian counterpart. Now he was being asked for his opinion — presumably on how to de-escalate the conflict.

"René," Farnham began, "I suppose I ought to tell you that I have been advised to reinforce the border."

"Your military advisors would have been derelict had they not suggested that, President Farnham," René admitted. "While I assure you that it is not necessary, I quite understand that you will listen to them and not to me, especially since I have received — and acted upon — the exact same advice from my military advisors. Let's keep our fingers crossed that there are no further mistakes between your soldiers and mine."

Farnham found himself unable to maintain his previous anger at Lalouche. He was coming — slowly — to believe what he was hearing on the phone. Perhaps it had all been just a misunderstanding. It would be a serious error to let it escalate to the point that former friends became enemies. And he, Farnham, had been making some bad judgments, largely by jumping to unwarranted conclusions. The voice of reason in his head was beginning to make itself felt.

"I absolutely agree, René, and although I am going to allow the border to be reinforced, I will also specifically direct those troops to maintain the highest degree of restraint while they are there."

"I think that's a very good plan, Mr. President," Lalouche concluded. "Let's stay in close contact and do all we can to see this through to a peaceful conclusion."

"Agreed," Farnham responded. "Good talking with you, Prime Minister."

"And for me as well, Mr. President."

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Rolling southeastward on I-84 toward Boise to engage the rebels, the men of the Oregon National Guard talked among themselves, mostly of unimportant things — the latest reality TV shows and how the local sports teams were doing — until one of the soldiers broached a new topic.

Corporal Larry Miskimen stood up in the back of the truck and asked in a voice only slightly louder than the current level of conversation: "Isn't anybody else but me bothered by all of this?"

"All of what, Larry?" one of them queried. The rest of the conversation stopped. Everyone knew an important question had been asked.

"All of this!" Larry waved his arms around him. "We're being sent off to fight against other American citizens who haven't done anything to us. They're just people like us who want to be left alone and, like us, they're tired of having morons in Washington push them around. Doesn't it bother you that you're being sent to kill kids who might be related to your next-door neighbor?"

"Yeah, it bothers me," one of them admitted, "It also bothers me that we're being sent to where those same kids might kill me, but what can we do about it?" A few others muttered their agreement.

"We can decline to fight them," Larry offered. "We've got guns, but we don't have to aim them. We don't have to shoot at people who shouldn't be our enemies."

"Or we could use them on our officers," one of them suggested. This was greeted by a round of laughter. There seemed to be none of them unalterably opposed to the idea.

Through the gap where the canvas flaps almost met to keep the blustery winter winds from entering the back of the truck, they could see a Humvee speeding to catch up with the head of the convoy. As it passed, Larry pulled a hand-grenade from his belt and grabbed the ring. Four other hands closed around his and prevented him from yanking the pin and making the grenade active.

"Larry, don't be a fool," one of them snapped. "There'll be plenty of time for that later when you won't have a thousand witnesses to point their fingers at you." Larry sat down.

That same scene, or something very much like it, played in three other trucks during the trip.

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Barreling eastward on I-10, armored units of the California National Guard and Marines from Twentynine Palms approached the Arizona border. East of Chiriaco Summit, Oscar Eagle-Claw sat at a McDonald's overlooking the Interstate savoring his Big Mac and mentally counting the vehicles passing. When the count got to 300, he stuffed the last bite of his burger into his mouth, took a sip from his Diet Coke, got up and strolled to his car. He started the engine and headed for the westbound ramp onto I-10. Two miles down the road, he slipped the earpiece from his phone onto his ear, and dialed from memory his contact in Arizona.

"More than 300 vehicles including APCs and Bradleys moving east from Chiriaco," he told his contact, then disconnected and took

the next northbound exit. He wiped the phone clean of fingerprints and tossed it into the brush alongside the road. Tomorrow he would report the phone stolen and get a replacement.

At Luke AFB, 32 A-10s roared down the runway and into the air, heading 270°. They stayed low and adjusted their course either north or south to avoid overflying populated areas. An AWACS over the Goldwater Range monitored electronic emissions and kept the A-10s apprised of the location of the convoy. At the same time, two squadrons of F-16s from Luke AFB were completing a long loop to the south through the Goldwater Range, and as they did, they increased their altitude until they were sure they were visible to the convoy's air cover. The F-16s accompanying the California National Guard convoy along I-10 turned to intercept these Arizona Air National Guard F-16s and left the convoy largely without air support. 20 miles west of Blythe, California, the A-10s found their target.

With the convoy lined up on the Interstate, they made a perfect target. It was difficult, under these circumstances, for the A-10 gunners to miss. Two dozen helicopter gunships, the convoy's only remaining air cover, were ripped to tatters in the first pass. In six minutes from the firing of the first shots, there were no helicopters in the air and 23 burning Bradley Fighting Vehicles blocking the Interstate. Many of the trucks of the convoy were rendered inoperable as well, and now smoke from burning fuel made it difficult for the A-10s to get a clear sighting. The A-10s low on ammunition turned and headed east. The others turned southeast toward where five squadrons of F-16s were disputing each others' claims to air superiority.

By the time the A-10s met the survivors of the engagement, three CaANG F-16s, the fighters were without air-to-air missiles and this gave the 18 A-10s in the second group a more even footing on which to do battle. Nevertheless, the slower A-10s were unable to cope with the speedy fighters and managed to damage none of them while losing seven more A-10s to cannonfire. At that point, the F-16s appeared to have had enough or perhaps they were out of ammunition. Whichever, they turned away from the remaining A-10s and headed back to their base. Eleven A-10s did likewise.

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In London, the United States' ambassador had been summoned to the Foreign Office and now sat before the Foreign Minister. "His Majesty's Government is quite concerned," the Foreign Minister began, "over the way events are developing in your country."

"His Majesty's Government finds itself in good company," the U.S. ambassador replied. "My government is also very concerned."

"As well you ought," the Foreign Minister continued. "However, those events seem to be spilling over upon your neighbors, specifically Canada, in whom we have something of a proprietary interest. We are informed that troops are massing on Canada's southern border, and this is the event that most concerns us."

"I'm not entirely sure I understand your concern, minister," the ambassador parried. "Are you concerned over the Canadian troops massed on their southern border, or ours?"

"Both, of course. We consider both those countries to be fast friends and allies, and we would be most distressed to see them come to blows. That would, of course, force us to take the side of one against the other. As a member of the Commonwealth, Canada has the better claim to our loyalty. I trust you can see the uncomfortable situation in which that would place all of us."

"Let me assure His Majesty's Government that The United States will not be the aggressor in any conflict that might develop in North America."

"I'm delighted to hear that, Mr. Ambassador," the Foreign Minister concluded. "Please convey our best wishes for an early resolution of the conflict to your President."

"I will certainly do that, Minister." With that, the ambassador stood, shook the Foreign Minister's hand, and left to return to the embassy.

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Tony Palladino huddled behind a desk that had been pushed over toward the window of the U.S. Customs shack at Portal, ND and waited. The gate had been pulled down right after this morning's incident and had remained shut. Tony steadfastly refused to open the gate to allow traffic from the U.S. side to transit into Canada. Periodically he would go outside and try to convince the waiting motorists to turn around and go home. A few dozen yards away, the Canadians were doing the same thing. Here at Portal, ND, the border was closed for the first time in history. Television crews from nearby cities were already on site to cover the 'invasion' and their correspondents were busily interviewing motorists and truckers stranded on the U.S. side of the border.

Around 9:30 AM the vanguard of the First Cavalry arrived in their helicopter gunships. The event was observed by Lieutenant Pinkham's crew and duly reported up the line, first to Regina, and then to Ottawa. The lead gunship dropped two officers near the Customs

building and retired south with the others about 6 miles down US 52. Major Morton Janes and his aide entered the Customs shack and headed for Tony Palladino. Janes stuck out his hand toward Tony.

"I'm Major Janes," he told Tony. "We're your relief. What's the situation?"

Tony leaned his M-16 against the wall, the first time it had been out of his immediate possession since 5am. "About five this morning, a Canadian unit crossed the border —"

"I know all that," Janes cut him off. "I want to know your situation now. Where are the Canadians now?"

"They re-crossed the border and I haven't seen them since," Tony admitted. "I can see one group — it may be the same group — through the binoculars off to the northeast."

Janes took the glasses and scanned the northeast briefly until he located Pinkham's observation post. He watched for a few seconds then, without taking the glasses down, asked Tony: "...and they've been there since?"

"Yes," Tony admitted. "They're just sitting there watching me watching them. What are they waiting for?"

Janes turned to the Lieutenant at his side and told him: "I think this is a crock of shit. If the Canadians were going to invade, they would have sent more than just one APC, and they wouldn't have re-crossed the border just because one lone Customs guard sent a couple of rounds their way. Even so, we have to secure the border, so set up a lookout post here or down the road and have it staffed around the clock, just in case."

"Do you want volunteers?" the Lieutenant asked.

The Major thought for a moment, then replied: "Sure, ask for volunteers, but pick your crew from the non-volunteers. I don't want any trigger-happy 19-year-olds getting into a firefight over nothing. Anybody who wants this job is disqualified from it. Remember: our orders are to exercise maximum restraint in dealing with the Canadians."

Tony Palladino wore a look of disbelief. "What do you mean, 'nothing'?" he retorted. "They invaded our country!"

Major Janes turned to face Palladino. Pointing behind himself to the Canadian observation post he snarled at Tony: "You call that an invasion? They likely got disoriented in the dark, that's all. If you hadn't fired on them, I'd still be in South Dakota getting ready to trash the Wyoming Guard." He turned and exited onto the street, followed closely by the lieutenant, just as a Humvee pulled up. They swung themselves into the Humvee, and Janes motioned to the driver to head south toward their encampment.

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East of Casper, Wyoming, a scout returned from a patrol near the front and reported for debriefing. He had already reported via radio that the troops and helicopters that had been there at sunset were no longer to be found, save for a small group of soldiers that appeared to be nothing more than a forward observation post. The images from his camera clearly showed a large disturbed area where there had been much equipment, but the equipment itself was gone.

"What the hell is going on here?" their commanding officer muttered to himself. "Are we so small a threat that we aren't worth defending against?" He turned to the scout. "Is that OP in Wyoming or South Dakota?"

The scout unholstered his GPS device and played with the keys for a few moments, reviewing his patrol route. "They're about 180 feet from the border, and they're in Wyoming", the scout confirmed.

The colonel turned to his staff and ordered: "I want them taken alive." The other officers left to make that happen.

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I-84 crosses from Oregon into Idaho near Ontario, Oregon, lancing south-southeast across the Snake River. The Oregon State Police had a cruiser stationed on the Oregon-side of the border since the opening of hostilities, but they didn't actually have any orders to stop traffic crossing between the two states. They just observed traffic and watched for anything that would have caused the Governor of Oregon to get upset. So far, they had seen nothing of any consequence. In fact, traffic had all but ceased over the past day as if everyone knew something bad was about to happen there.

Now the Oregon National Guard was on station west of I-84 and south of Ontario, and they had taken over the task of guarding the border between the formerly-United States and the — what *were* they calling themselves? Did anyone know? Well, it really didn't matter much, anyway. They were here to guard the border and to prepare for what many of them considered a foregone conclusion: the invasion of Idaho.

A few of them, however, were having second thoughts, and Larry Miskimen was just one of them. There were others of whose existence he might have been aware, but of whose opinions regarding their ultimate mission he could not have known. Now Larry had a quiet moment with his platoonmates and he raised the issue again.

"I don't like this at all," he muttered noncommittally and waited for a reaction.

"I can't say I blame you," Roger Duncan replied, and that sentiment was affirmed by a low chorus of muttering from the rest of the platoon, so Duncan continued: "I don't mind doing guard duty to protect from an invasion, but I hear we're going to do some invading of our own. You know Idaho has their own boys across the Snake waiting for us. And how are we going to get over there? Answer: we're going to march across that bridge right into their guns, and we're going to be cut down just like we'd cut them down if they came over here. Screw that."

"So," one of the others inquired, "how do you plan to avoid it?"

"I don't know," Duncan answered, "but I'm thinking."

Another chimed in: "If those idiot officers order us to march across that bridge —" he whipped a white handkerchief from his pocket "— I'm tying this to the muzzle of my rifle."

"You'll be shot from behind by your own comrades," Duncan warned him.

"So? After I'm dead, will I care whether I got shot from the front or the back?"

"You'd *surrender*?" another asked incredulously. "Without firing a shot? What good will that do?"

"It wouldn't do any good," the first answered, "but it will avoid the evil of me having to fire on my own countrymen. Doesn't that count for something?"

Most of them looked down at the floor. They all needed time to think about what was about to happen, and how they would conduct themselves when it did. They didn't have to wait long. A face pushed through the tent flaps and announced: "Assembly in five." They looked at each other, gathered their gear, and started for the assembly area.

With the entire force lined up in Company order, their Captain addressed them: "Men, the Idaho Guard is in position on the north side of the highway. In thirty-five minutes, the sun will be low in the sky and provide the maximum blinding effect so far today. In thirty-five minutes we will make our push across the river and attack." Several of the men snorted in disbelief. The Captain ignored them. "Your sergeants will start the charge with a hand signal. If we do this silently, we could be on them before they know we're coming, so there must be no yelling or loud footfalls on the bridge during the attack. Any questions?" He waited a few seconds and hearing no response from the men, ordered: "Platoon leaders, ready your men."

The men fell out of ranks and began preparing for the onslaught. There were a few, generally among the inexperienced, who were looking forward to action against opposing troops. Most of the older men understood that they weren't, in fact, invincible, that the Idaho Guard troops were about as well trained as they were, and that this would be a generally even contest except that the Idahoans were on their own territory and, therefore, had the home court advantage. This was not going to be a good day for the Oregonians even if everything went perfectly.

Within the half-hour, sergeants rounded up their units and got them moved over to the edge of the highway. Everyone looked into the southwest to observe the sun as it dipped toward the horizon. Suddenly, Company A began to move up onto the highway and south across the Snake River. Company B followed immediately, and as Larry Miskimen's unit got to the pavement, several of them pulled out handkerchiefs and began tying them to the muzzles of their rifles. Others observed this and nervously looked around to see how many more were doing the same.

Up ahead, they could see that the leaders for Company A were holding their rifles horizontally above their heads. Behind them, a Lieutenant hurried to the front with his sidearm. "You get those rifles down and pointed forward," he ordered them, and at that moment the leaders broke into a run for the Idaho side. The Lieutenant raised his pistol to shoot the deserters, but someone behind him cut him down with a three-round burst. At this, the entire company broke into a run for Idaho, rifles high above their heads. Some soldiers behind them fired on the runners killing several, while soldiers behind them broke into groups, some firing on the deserters, others giving the deserters covering fire. In the space of minutes, complete chaos had broken out on the bridge. The Idaho Guard troops couldn't tell who they should shoot at, so they fired on anyone who wasn't carrying his rifle high.

Larry Miskimen and Roger Duncan were both killed in the skirmish, probably by Idaho troops who couldn't tell who they were shooting at. In all, thirty-eight Oregonians successfully defected into Idaho and were interned for the duration. One hundred seventeen corpses littered the Snake River bridge.

9 - Insh'allah

Bakuba, Iraq

Dawn comes early in the desert, and the general lack of trees around the encampment made it seem all that much earlier. For Captain Mark Forester, however, it seemed even earlier than that. For the guard detail outside his quarters, this would be the first time they had participated in the execution of an officer for dereliction of duty during wartime.

When Utah, his home state, had seceded from the Union, Captain Forester had called his men together and informed them that he was resigning his commission and going home where, he said, he was needed by the people of his state.

That resignation was refused by his commanding officer, a Brigadier from New York, who advised Mark to "shut your damn traitorous mouth and get back to your assigned duty".

"My duty, sir," he told the general, "is in Utah."

"Your duty," the general informed him, "is wherever the Hell I say it is, and I say it's right out there." He pointed to the city beyond the fence.

"With all due respect —"

"There's no respect here, Captain," the general cut him off. "If you had any respect, you would be attending to the duty that brought you here in the first place. Instead, unless I read you completely wrong, you intend to take up arms against your country. That's treason in my book. By all rights, I should have you shot. Now, get out of here before you make me do something I'll regret. You're dismissed."

Captain Forester saluted, then turned and left the office, unsure as yet exactly what he would do when duty called. As if to signal his resolve to himself, if to none other, he unshipped his uniforms from his closet and methodically began removing the insignia of rank. One by one, the twin silver bars came off the lapels and were stowed in a small leather pouch. As he finished, his roommate returned from a patrol and found him clearing away and bringing out his laptop computer.

"What are you doing?" his roommate asked.

"I've resigned my commission," Forester told him.

"You're joking! You can't resign a commission in the middle of a war. You'll be in the brig for the duration."

"It's not a war," Forester told him. "I don't know what it is, but it's not war until Congress says it's war, and they haven't said that. All Congress did was authorize the use of force. That's not war. 'War' has a very specific meaning in international law. Didn't you learn that at the Point?"

"I didn't go to West Point. I came up through OCS."

"Even so," Forester retorted, "you get taught The Law of War in Officer Candidate School, don't you?"

"I suppose so," his roommate responded, "but they don't grade that course very hard. OCS is heavy on the practical."

"Well, take my word for it, then," Forester assured him, "this isn't war." Forester turned to the keyboard and began typing:

Dear Governor Slaney,

I have today resigned my commission as a member of the Utah Guard deployed with regular Army forces in Bakuba, Iraq, and have requested that I be redeployed immediately back to Utah where I may assist with whatever duties the State of Utah may require of me.

I have little confidence that this request will be honored, but I wanted to be on record as having made my intentions clear to one and all. I am a proud citizen of Utah, and I support your efforts to keep Utah free and sovereign.

I am very far from being the only Utahn here holding that point of view. Many others feel the same way, although few, I fear, will take the bull by the horns as I have. If no others follow me, do not be misled that I am the only one. At most, I am the only one to demand repatriation.

And if none follow me, I will not condemn them for their choice. Each of us must choose for ourselves and not for others. That's really what the current dispute is all about, isn't it? Others insist on choosing for us how we shall live, and we Utahns insist that we will choose for ourselves.

I can no longer permit that in my own case. Stand

fast, Utah.

Capt Mark Forester
4th Utah Field Artillery
Bakuba, Iraq

He sent it via email to the Governor's Office and to the Brigadier General for the Utah Guard, and he copied it to the Deseret News, the Salt Lake City Tribune, and the Ogden Standard-Examiner.

"If that doesn't tear it, I can't imagine what it might take," he muttered to himself.

The Ogden S-E gave the letter front page coverage because Forester was a home-town boy. AP picked up the story and had it on the wire the same day. The Washington Post included it in their morning edition. Tempers flared at the Pentagon before lunch. In Iraq, a Brigadier General's ears burned by dinnertime. He was already aware of some of what was going on because in a tight-knit community, news travels fast. But he didn't know that Forester had gone public with his refusal until word came from Washington to stamp this rebellion out before it spread.

He had Forester arrested and thrown in the brig until the matter could be investigated. Alas, that was not best way to stamp out a rebellion. In fact, it may have been one of the poorest. What he did next also did not help: he convened a general court-martial to try Forester for dereliction of duty.

At trial, Forester made a brief opening statement outlining his position that this was not a war-time offense (since Congress had not actually declared war) and that, in such circumstances, a superior officer does not have the luxury of refusing a resignation. Then the defense rested, having neither called witnesses nor offered testimony.

Forester presumed (correctly) that he would be found guilty and presumed (incorrectly) that he would be transferred to a state-side brig where his status would be a matter of negotiation between Utah and the remaining United States of America. Instead, the court discarded his contention that this was *not* war-time and sentenced him to death by firing squad. A frantic appeal up the line was summarily denied by officers who had also been instructed to stamp out Forester's revolt.

Keys clanked in the cell door and it opened to allow the escort to bring the prisoner to the place of execution. They marched him to the eastern edge of the compound and handcuffed him to a post.

Although he refused a blindfold, one was placed across his eyes anyway.

For normal executions, one rifle has a blank round. This allows each member of the firing squad to believe that somebody else's rifle fired the fatal shot, that *their* weapon had the blank round. For this execution, all the rifles were loaded with live rounds. There was to be no chance that Forester might survive this. His revolt was to end here and now.

With the squad drawn up on a firing line, the squad leader, a 2nd Lieutenant, ordered: "Ready —" Four of the eight rifles fell to the ground. The men were refusing to participate in the execution. The Lieutenant drew his sidearm, picked one of the four, and shot him in the head. "Pick up those rifles," he ordered the other three.

Two of them immediately reached down to retrieve their rifles. The third hesitated, and the Lieutenant was taking a bead on him, ready to execute him as well, when one of the four who had kept their rifles shot the Lieutenant in the back, clean through the heart. The Lieutenant collapsed in a heap.

Actions clattered as rifles were made ready. The firing squad was surrounded and taken into custody themselves. A Major grabbed one of the rifles surrendered by the firing squad, turned, aimed at Forester's chest and fired. Forester's body flinched, then fell forward, dead.

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At a hastily called officers' meeting, the Brigadier, who was clearly worried about a wider revolt, urged all his staff to find out who was reliable and who was not. The firing squad had been selected from a pool of volunteers and were presumably ready to carry out an execution. Yet half of them had volunteered simply to have the opportunity to make a statement of protest. The 'statement' had cost one of them his life, and would likely claim four more, and *none* of them were from breakaway states. There seemed to be no way to know with any sort of certainty who could be trusted and who might shoot an officer at the first opportunity.

Across town, news of the incident had reached the ears of the local militia commander who was hosting his own officers' meeting.

"This is the opportunity we have been waiting for," his second-in-command asserted. "They are fighting among themselves. We should attack as soon as we are able."

The militia leader stood so that he could clearly see everyone's eyes for himself, and it was also a signal to them that they should be

quiet while he spoke. "I agree that this is an historic and unprecedented opportunity," he began, "but I don't know that attacking them will be our most profitable alternative. What is it that we want from these soldiers? Do we not wish them to leave — to go home and never return? We kill them only to prevent them returning, but if they will leave and never return *without* us killing them, does that not match — exactly — our aims? It is said that one always has to have a plan, but does it always have to be the same plan? I want to hear a different plan." He sat down.

There was a long pause while the officers mulled this new thought. One took a drag on his cigarette and, as he exhaled the smoke, he began talking: "The United States is breaking up. The shooting this morning was of several soldiers who wanted to go home to fight in their civil war. Their officers won't release them, so they started shooting, and now they're dead. There may be more of them. What if we offer them safe passage?"

"To where?" another asked.

Another long pause. "Maybe the Iranians would help," another suggested.

This was becoming a brainstorming session. A fourth offered "If we can get them into Iran, they can fly to Italy. The Italians hate the American government after that incident with the journalist who was shot. From Rome to Mexico City, then they can fly to wherever they need to go."

"That sounds expensive," a fifth chimed in. "Who's going to pay for this?"

"The Americans are rich. We can even charge them a fee for arranging the return of their children. Maybe we can even get a kick-back from the airlines, too."

There was much laughter over this, but not at the plan itself. The plan sounded as though it could be made to work.

"How would we do this?" the militia leader asked. "How do we let these soldiers know we've gone into the business of helping them get home — that we've become travel agents?"

"And more importantly, how will we know they've decided to use our services?" the second-in-command added.

"We need a signal," one suggested, "something that tells us they're interested."

"Suppose we order all of our men not to shoot anyone carrying their rifle a particular way. Then we tell the Americans 'carry your rifle this way and we'll help you get home'."

"So," the officer next to him butted in, "they all start carrying their rifles that way and when we go out to greet them they shoot us full of holes. I don't like that idea."

"I admit it has some element of risk to it," the first agreed, "but how risky is it to get into a firefight with them? We're not running a coffee shop here, you know. And if there's shooting and the only ones shot are those carrying their rifles some other way —"

"— and after we've wiped out two-thirds of them, we can kill all the rest" the other finished the sentence.

"That won't work at all," the first followed. "If they find twenty dead and ten missing, we'll get more customers. If they find thirty dead, ten of whom were unarmed when shot, we'll never get that opportunity again. As the commander points out, our aim is to move them away from here to a place they want to be so that they'll never come back. We want to move *all* of them, not just ten or twenty. It's also important that, a week later, they can send email back to their friends still here telling them that they're safe at home. If that happens, we'll have more customers than we can handle. Is that not worth an attempt?"

Throughout Bakuba and the neighboring countryside, militia leaders read the order from headquarters with disbelief. "Post these signs all throughout your area," it ordered them, "and instruct your men that for the next thirty days they are not to target any American soldier whose rifle is carried pointing down at the ground. Other soldiers can be targeted. Bring survivors to me when it is safe to travel."

Their contacts in Iran had agreed to the plan on the condition that the soldiers could arrange for airline tickets to be bought for them. The Iranians thought that the cost could easily get out of hand and without the support of the Iranian government — which they didn't have — would quickly become overwhelming. It was enough that the Iranian government had agreed to 'look the other way' when certain people boarded airplanes bound for Rome.

The Italians had also agreed that they would take reduced notice of Americans in uniform on their way to Mexico.

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Attention! American Soldiers!

Do you want to go home?
We want you to go home, too!

Help us help you get home!

Carry your rifle with the muzzle pointed down at the ground. During this special free trial period you will not be targeted while your rifle is pointed down.

Soldiers carrying their rifle in a threatening manner will be targeted. You choose: go home on an airplane seat or go home in a box.

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The Humvee screeched to a halt and four sets of boots hit the ground. Corporal Wills spun around with his rifle level and ready to return fire. Their Sergeant scanned the area looking for threats and seeing none, waved to the patrol to follow him down the street. They had gone only thirty or forty meters before one of them noticed the signs. There was a sign on almost every pole along the street.

"Sarge, take a look at this," Wills called to him.

The Sergeant sauntered toward Wills, still sweeping his sight right, left, up, and down for anything out of the ordinary. He read the sign quickly, then ripped it from the pole, folded it, and put it in his pocket. The others were stealing glances at copies posted on nearer poles. One of them casually allowed his rifle to droop so the muzzle was aimed low.

"That's gotta be bogus," Wills remarked.

"No doubt," the Sergeant agreed as he swept the roofline with his muzzle. "Wills, grab a few more of those signs."

Wills pulled four more of the signs from nearby posts and the patrol inched their way back to their Humvee. Back at the compound, Sergeant Murphy handed over two of the signs to the base Intelligence Officer who looked at them and frowned. This could be very bad news. If the signs were a trap, men were going to die if they believed the not-so-veiled promise of repatriation. If the signs were genuine offers to smuggle troops out of Iraq, that could cut deeply — no one dared speculate how deeply — into their troop strength.

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The following morning's pre-patrol briefing included a laughably inadequate warning about the dangers of trusting the militias, and an equally laughable order to keep the muzzle up at all times. Privately, platoon leaders were warned to watch for drooping muzzles and to shoot, if necessary, any deserters.

Sergeant Murphy's patrol that morning was 18 soldiers in three Humvees. Two of them were detailed to guard the vehicles while the other 16 patrolled in force. Periodically, Murphy would assign them in threes and fours to scout down side alleys. As Wills, Cox, and Minker wandered down one of those alleys, a young boy watched them intently. As they passed, all three muzzles low, the boy asked: "Do you want to go home?"

The three looked at each other and the boy before Cox told him: "Yeah, I want to go home."

"Me, too," the other two added almost in unison.

The boy got up from the barrel he was seated on and turned to enter the house, wagging his finger behind him for the men to follow. All four entered the house and exited out the back, across a courtyard, into a second house and out its front door where an old man waited with a truck.

"Get in," he told them, and the three climbed into the truck and closed the canvas flaps at the back. The old man got into the truck and started it, and the boy climbed in beside him. The truck rumbled away into the hills beyond the edge of town. After about fifteen minutes, the truck slowed and stopped. The boy came around to the back and yelled: "Okay, you get out now."

Cox pulled the canvas back and found himself looking at the muzzles of several AK-47s. He jumped down, careful to keep the muzzle low all the time. The others followed him.

One of the militiamen pointed to the M-16s the three soldiers still carried. "You won't need those from here," he told them, "and you can leave the belts, too," he indicated the ammunition belts that hung from their waists.

They parked the M-16s against a wall and undid their belts, leaving them behind as well. The militiaman motioned to them to follow and they entered a building off to the side. Inside they were offered dishdashas, the long, white robes worn by the locals.

"So, this is for real," Wills asked the militiaman.

"For real?" the Iraqi asked, not sure of the meaning of the phrase.

"We're not being kidnapped," Wills offered.

"No," the militiaman assured him, "no, this is 'for real'. We are going to smuggle you out of Iraq."

"What then?" Cox asked.

The Iraqi shrugged. "Then you go where you wish. When we get to a safe area, you will send an email to your family, they will arrange transportation for you from probably Tehran, Iran."

"Tehran?" Minker repeated, startled. "We can't go to Tehran. The Iranians will intern us."

The militiaman put his finger to his lips in a sign of secrecy. "The Iranians won't pay any attention to you," he assured them. "Your military ID cards will be accepted without question here and in Rome and in Mexico City. It's all arranged. All you need is passage."

Outside, clad in their new robes, the soldiers climbed into the back of a pick-up truck and headed northeast across the desert. After almost two hours they stopped for something to eat.

"They have internet access here," the militiaman told them. "If you want to send a note, you can do it now."

Cox sat down at the keyboard and typed the URL for his email server. He started a new note to his sister:

Dear Sis,

I am in Kermanshah, Iran, on my way to Tehran and then home to you and the folks. I will need pre-paid plane tickets from Tehran through Rome through Mexico City to Denver. Please have tickets waiting for me at the Tehran airport for a departure tomorrow or the next day, but tomorrow is better. Don't route me through any airports in the US. I'm not sure I'd be allowed to continue on without orders.

Give Roscoe a kick for me and tell him I'll settle our old score when I get there.

—Tim

Roscoe was his sister's cat who never liked Tim and scratched him whenever Tim passed. The last sentence was one that would let his sister know that this was really her brother sending the note and not some scam to filch the cost of a long-distance plane ticket from a loving family.

When he was finished sending his note, Wills and Minker each took turns doing the same.

After a quick bite to eat and cool water to drink, they climbed back into a different pick-up truck, this one with Iranian plates, and continued their journey. They were a minimum of four hours from Tehran and were now accompanied by Iranians sympathetic to the Iraqi militia. They had shed their desert uniforms and replaced them with civilian garb. All they kept were their dogtags and their military ID cards which, they had been advised, was all they would need between here and home. While they had thus far been treated well, it was still possible that this was a vast scam and that they would not be going home after all. The risk, however, seemed worth taking. Having watched Captain Forester being executed for being loyal to his state, they had lost any desire to get themselves killed for those who had condemned him to death.

In due course, however, the pick-up truck entered the grounds of the Tehran airport. A laptop computer was soon running from the truck's cigarette lighter outlet as the truck cruised looking for a wireless hotspot. After ten minutes of prowling, they found one and signed on to it. Wills, Cox, and Minker took turns fetching their email back to find where their tickets might be or if they might be.

Each of them found that they had been routed from Tehran to Mexico City with a change of planes in Paris. This was a potential problem, since France had not been party to the agreement. If the French authorities decided to check on why these three US soldiers were traveling without orders, their trip could come to an abrupt halt. After landing in Paris, however, they discovered they did not even have to leave the boarding area at Charles deGaulle Airport when changing planes. Since they had no luggage there was no need to clear customs, so they waited the two hours until their flight was called and boarded it without incident.

When they left Bakuba, they had between them US dollars and Iraqi dinars totaling perhaps US\$60, and this had kept them fed and watered between planes. The 12-hour transatlantic flight had, predictably, plenty to drink and several meals, so they were in no danger of starving while *en route*, and the cabin attendants seemed not averse to special requests, so some of the meals came with seconds.

In Mexico City, the three split up, Cox boarding his flight for Denver, Wills to Reno, and Minker to Albuquerque. Within another day, their friends in Bakuba would know they had arrived safely home, and the rumors of their kidnapping and gruesome deaths at the hands of the militia would be put to rest.

Iraqi militia subordinates would soon be complaining that they were ferrying so many deserters across the border that they had no time to actually carry out military missions, but they would also note

that the operation was costing them only gasoline, not ammunition and casualties. Before two weeks had passed, militia units across Iraq had adopted the tactic and the U.S.Army was hemorrhaging personnel.

10 - Developments

Portal, ND

"How do I get there from here?" Major Janes asked Tony Palladino, not taking his eyes from the binoculars. The Canadian observation post had shown no signs of activity for the past day and Janes was beginning to wonder if there were actual live people manning it.

"Head down US 52," Palladino began, "and take a left on 109th. Cross the tracks and make your next left. That will take you right up to the border within yards of them."

"If it's that easy to cross the border," Janes asked casually, "why doesn't everybody do it?"

"Mostly, everyone does — did — if they're local and know the back roads," Tony admitted, "but the truckers generally follow the rules. They have to have Customs declarations validated or they get bagged at the first weigh station."

Janes turned and headed for the door not even bothering to tell Tony Palladino he was leaving. He motioned for his driver to 'mount up' and the Humvee turned to follow US 52 southeast out of Portal. Barely over a half-mile later as US 52 curved southward, the driver turned left. The Humvee bounced over the Soo Line tracks and then the driver was turning again, this time northwesterly, paralleling US 52, heading back toward the border. As they approached the International Boundary, here represented only by a small sign by the roadside, the vehicle pulled to the shoulder. Janes got out and stood mere inches from trespassing into Canada, looking at the Canadians a few dozen meters away.

"Something we can do for you, Major?" Lieutenant Pinkham shouted, his hand raised in salute.

"Just wanted to see what we're up against, Lieutenant," Janes replied returning the salute. "Care to join me here?"

Pinkham dropped from the LAV and sauntered toward the border. He was not carrying his submachine gun. In a moment, he was standing facing Janes across the invisible line that divided their two nations.

"Actually," Janes began, "I was hoping to talk to you to find out the real circumstances that cause me to be here and not

somewhere I could be doing something useful... South Dakota, for instance. Exactly what *did* happen the night you crossed the border?"

"That was purely an accident," Pinkham assured him. "My driver wasn't watching where he was going and missed a turn. Before we knew it, we were across the border against orders. Your Customs guy must have thought it was the beginning of an invasion. Shots were fired, and we hustled back across into Canada as quick as we could. The only good part of all this is that I'm assured a place in our history books. *'The first Canadian in 200 years to be fired upon by U.S. forces'*. Can't say I'm pleased with it all, either. I expect I'll be court-martialed as soon as all the dust settles."

"Well, Lieutenant, you can always call me as a character witness, if nothing else," Janes assured him.

"Thank you, Major," Pinkham responded. "I appreciate that."

"I presume you're here to warn Ottawa of the American invasion?" Janes asked.

"Indeed, sir," Pinkham confirmed.

"Carry on," Janes told him, but it was only a suggestion. Pinkham saluted Janes. Janes returned the salute and walked back to the Humvee. His driver turned south and headed back to their base camp in a fallow field north of Lignite, North Dakota.

The Spanish Embassy, 2375 Pennsylvania Av NW

James McKinnon, Farnham's Secretary of State, gripped the hand of his good friend, Manuel Escondido, Spain's ambassador to the United States. "I'm delighted you could be here tonight, James," Escondido greeted him. "Not only does your charming wife add luster to a dinner party, but there are also matters I wish to discuss with you *tête-à-tête*, if you have a few moments."

"I will always have time for you, Manuel," McKinnon assured him. "Does this concern the current domestic situation?"

"Alas, yes, it does," Escondido admitted with a sigh, "but let's not talk on an empty stomach." Escondido led McKinnon and his wife, Clare, into the main hall of the embassy.

McKinnon was overly cautious that evening about what he was drinking, especially. If Escondido was going to talk business, he wanted to have his wits about him. It wasn't that he didn't trust Manuel Escondido. He did trust him in a way that diplomats rarely trusted one another, but this affair with the Constitutional Alliance — that's what they were now calling themselves — was changing the shape of the world as diplomats saw it. Countries that had been allies for centuries — Canada was just the most visible example — were now

something less than they had always been. It was unsettling, to say the least. It was upsetting the neatness of the world order, and this was always a sign that diplomats were about to have a sudden increase in their workload. McKinnon understood that that was what he was paid for, but he didn't have to like it.

Dinner over, the men retired to the smoking room where they proceeded to light up fine Cuban cigars. Ordinary American citizens couldn't get such things legally, but this was the Diplomatic Corps. They were above the law, *de facto* if not *de jure*.

Escondido motioned to McKinnon to join him on the balcony overlooking the embassy's gardens. McKinnon followed.

"James," Escondido began when they had both slouched against the balcony's railing, "you know how I hate to be the bearer of bad news."

"Manuel," McKinnon assured him, "you are not alone in that. No one likes to be the bearer of bad news."

"Indeed," Manuel agreed, "but it's especially hard when the transaction is between two who have grown to so understand each other as you and I, is it not?" McKinnon nodded and Escondido continued. "So, I wish you to accept what I am about to say in the spirit of that friendship we have shared now for — how long is it? — sixteen years?"

"More like seventeen," McKinnon mused, then waited for Escondido to finish.

"My government is very concerned over the events unfolding here in the States," Escondido spoke turning away to look out over the garden. "Madrid has received many, many messages from many, many of the Western Hispanic nations. They are all concerned for the possibility that the break-up of the United States will spill over to the south and that they will be... negatively affected. If that were to happen —" Escondido's voice trailed off and McKinnon understood that he simply couldn't bring himself to say the words. This was, after all, unofficial.

"Well, what would Madrid have us do, Manuel," McKinnon asked, "let rebels destroy their own country?"

"I am not privy to the inner councils of your government, James," Escondido countered, turning back to face McKinnon. "I'm not even privy to the inner councils of my own government, for that matter. What I'm saying to you tonight comes not from Madrid, at least, not officially. What I say tonight comes from here," and he touched his left breast over his heart. "You must find a way to come to grips with your problem without resorting to violence. The invasion Washington attempted earlier this week has turned many of your long-term allies away. They — and I presume Spain is among that group

even though I have heard nothing officially — are unwilling to condone another American Civil War."

"Condone?" McKinnon asked. "Are you saying we are brushing up against the possibility of war with former allies?"

"Oh, I don't think it could come to that without some very severe provocation on your part." He now looked directly into McKinnon's eyes. "That is what worries us. Your President has shown a frightening willingness to provoke. James, your President could easily start another World War. I'm sure you are aware of all the nightmare scenarios that accompany modern global conflict. James, you must find a way to come to grips with your problem without resorting to violence. You must!"

"I appreciate your candor, Manuel," McKinnon replied, then took a drag on his cigar. "I'm not sure I will have any success delivering your message without it becoming official. Do you have any suggestions, unofficially?"

"Is there no chance of reconciliation, James?" McKinnon shook his head. *No.* "Is there no chance that Washington will simply let those states depart?"

McKinnon raised his head. "Let them secede? That's completely out-of-the-question," McKinnon declared. "We've already had one civil war over that issue."

"Yet some among you seem not to have gotten the message. What of them? And then there's something else I happened to read within the week. In his First Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson said:

'If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.'

"It sounds to me as if at least this founding father was OK with the idea of secession. Doesn't it sound that way to you, too? Perhaps it wouldn't be as bad as you suspect."

"Jefferson died two hundred years ago, Manuel. I hardly think he's relevant to the present situation."

"That's an opinion that will wind up killing very many people, James," Escondido informed him with a distinct trace of sadness in his voice. "Besides, if they don't consider themselves part of your shared community anymore, then are they? It seems to me that once someone separates themselves in their own mind from the community, forcing them to remain a part of it cannot produce benefit for either side."

"Are you talking about Basque separatists, Manuel?" McKinnon countered.

"I wasn't," Escondido admitted, "but your point is well-taken. Indeed, the exact same analysis applies there as well. We have had no good come of our efforts to force the Basque to remain part of Spain. All we have gotten from the effort is years of debt, countless unnecessary deaths, and a deeper separation than we might have seen had we simply patted them on their collective asses and sent them off to independence. That's hard to admit, but it's the truth. Can you not see that what is truth in Spain is no less truth in America?"

McKinnon didn't reply for a long time. He just looked out toward the garden, or perhaps he was looking further out. It was hard for Manuel to tell, exactly. Finally he turned and faced Escondido. "Should the North have allowed the South to secede?" he asked.

"Perhaps," Manuel offered. "Six hundred thousand dead was a terrible price to pay. Who can say whether it was worth it. What was gained?"

"Then you would have consigned all those slaves to their fate? Manuel, that doesn't sound like you at all." McKinnon's tone, while light, carried an unmistakable challenge. Manuel Escondido rose to meet it.

"Is that what they teach in your schools, James?" he countered without hesitation. "Because that is not what your Civil War was fought over. At least, that's not what we learn in our schools. Everyone else in the world understands that it was fought over taxes and control, not slavery."

"What are you talking about?" McKinnon shot back. "Are you suggesting slavery was not an issue?"

"I'm sure it was an issue for some," Escondido admitted, "and that was why they fought. It was not what started the war itself. That was started because the North was taxing the South indirectly via import tariffs on manufactured cotton goods to prop up Northern manufacturers. European manufacturers who made shirts and sheets from Southern cotton couldn't sell those products in America because the tariffs made them too expensive. Eventually, they stopped buying Southern cotton, leaving the South with only one place to sell their product: the North, who could now squeeze the South on price. That's the Mercantilist System in its purest form, James. Besides, there were two inventions that spelled doom for human chattel slavery: the reaper and the cotton gin. Between these two machines, having vast herds of human draft animals was about to become so expensive, so economically unjustifiable that no one would be able to maintain them.

The so-called slave economy was on its last legs. It could not have survived into the 20th century. It was simply unaffordable."

"So you would have approved of slavery existing for another forty years?" McKinnon retorted.

"Certainly not," Escondido comforted him, patting his shoulder. "But look at how the British did away with their slave populations thirty years earlier," he offered. "They bought out all the slave-holders for cash. Nobody refused! They knew a good deal when they saw it: they gave up all those hungry mouths, they fired their overseers, and with all that cash they bought machinery. Everybody won! Why didn't Lincoln try that? He certainly knew how the British had handled their problem, didn't he? No, the slave-issue was not central to that conflict. It couldn't have been. Just look at the Emancipation Proclamation! Have you ever read it?"

McKinnon looked stunned. "Well — I —"

Manuel cut him off. "You've never read one of the seminal documents of your own history? James, I'm ashamed!"

"Of course I've read it," McKinnon snapped back. "I just don't recall—"

"—the details," Manuel finished for him. "Then let me fill you in on the details so you can more fully appreciate what you seem not to have been told: The Emancipation Proclamation applied only to states in rebellion. That is, slaves in Pennsylvania and New York were still slaves because they weren't affected by it. Those states were not trying to secede. The problem is that in the Southern states that were in rebellion, the Union couldn't enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. It was the first great piece of political PR in your history. It had no effect whatsoever. Why would Lincoln have done something so stupid? Answer: he wanted to whip up support for the conflict among the abolitionists. That's where you get the idea that your Civil War was all about slavery."

McKinnon's mouth hung open as if he wanted to say something but just couldn't find the words.

Manuel Escondido continued, since James McKinnon seemed unable to respond. "I have heard it said that history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." McKinnon smiled, and Manuel pressed on. "You have before you an example of a rhyme using the same word: control. One part of your country wishes to control the other part, and that other part is unwilling to be controlled. Yes, James, this civil war has precisely the same cause as your first, and it will be as bloody. Please, James, you must do something to stop this before it gets out of hand. If you don't, the whole world will be drawn into the fight, and there will be no winners."

Escondido had said all that he thought he could say without ending a nearly two-decade-long friendship. As if they had been summoned to rescue two drowning men, Linda Escondido and Clare McKinnon appeared on the balcony.

"Manuel," Señora Escondido chided him, "you're not talking business, are you? You promised me there would be none of that tonight. James, he hasn't been troubling you with grave matters of state, has he?"

McKinnon took her offered hand and kissed her fingertips. "Manuel," McKinnon offered, "whoever named this woman really knew what he was talking about."

"Oh, James," Linda Escondido blushed, "you're such a flirt!"

Ogden, UT

The announcement in the Standard-Examiner was very plain, very forthright: "Kathleen and Genevieve Forester announce the formation of a citizen militia in honor of their brother, Mark. All those interested in joining with them, please gather on the steps of Shelly Middle School at 7:30 PM Thursday evening for a brief organizational meeting."

By 7:00 PM, there wasn't a space left in the school's parking lot and people had to park on the street in front, and later, on side streets ever farther away from the school. The sisters arrived about 10 minutes later fully expecting to meet with a half-dozen men. Instead, they faced a crowd of perhaps 350, many of them women. There were so many people, the girls had to beg to be allowed through. "We're the Forester sisters. We need to get to the top step. Please let us through."

Finally they were able to plow through the crowd and gain a position at the top of the stairs. Kathleen, by virtue of being the eldest, took on the task of addressing the crowd.

"I'm stunned," she began. "I expected far fewer people than this might be interested in coming to the aid of their neighborhood and their state. But I'm also gratified. I'm Kathleen Forester, and on behalf of myself and my sister," she indicated Genevieve, "allow me to thank you for stepping forward. The purpose of the militia, as you all probably know, is to protect their neighbors in time of war and invasion. Now, we haven't been invaded yet (although they tried), but we have to be prepared for the day when that happens, and I assure you it will happen.

"Before we start, I have to admit that I am seriously unprepared for such a large turnout. May I ask for a volunteer to take

this sign-up sheet down to the office-supply store on 9th Street and make 400 more copies?" A hand shot into the air. "Thank you. Please pass this paper down to him. Sir, let me know what the copies cost, and I will reimburse you." The sheet was passed from hand to hand until it arrived at the volunteer who took it, cranked his motorcycle, and sped off toward the nearby shopping center.

"Now," Kathleen Forester continued, "how many of you have military experience?" Nearly every hand was raised. "Let's narrow it down a bit. How many of you were officers?" Many of the hands went down, but there were still several dozen hands in the air. "Would you all join me at the top of the stairs, please. Let them through, please."

The crowd parted for the men and women moving forward toward the school's front doors. A man in the front of the crowd called out: "Would we be better inside? The school has an auditorium that can handle this group easily."

Genevieve spoke up: "We didn't make arrangements to use the school. We thought the crowd would be smaller. We don't have keys."

The man held up a key ring and jangled it. "I'm the school custodian. I've already cleared it with the principal."

"Let that man through," Genevieve instructed, a smile spreading over her face.

The custodian unlocked the main doors and the people poured in. "Down the hall to your right, last set of doors on your left. The lights are already on. Everybody please take a seat but leave the first three rows empty."

By the time everyone had found a seat and the crowd was settling down, the volunteer arrived with a large envelope full of paper. He laid it on the edge of the stage. Kathleen bent down to ask "How much do I owe you?"

"It was free. When I told the manager they were sign-up sheets for Forester's Militia, he wouldn't charge me for it. But he did take one to fill out for himself." He handed her the filled-out sheet.

One of the officers clustered around Kathleen and Genevieve on the stage suggested: "Since there are so many people here, we ought to split this into groups geographically and let those who live near each other train together." This suggestion was enthusiastically received, and the officers began the process by sorting themselves by neighborhood. By asking the audience to identify by a show of hands approximately where they lived, they were able to break the assembled militiamen into four groups of roughly equivalent sizes. They assigned team names to each of those groups and asked the people to come up to the edge of the stage, fill out a sign-up form and also to indicate which geographic team they were signing up for. By

9:45 everyone had filled out a form, and volunteers had come forward to handle putting all the names into a database and setting up a telephone tree. Kathleen and Genevieve scheduled an officers' meeting for the following Tuesday, and the meeting broke up.

From the Rio Grande to the Canadian border, thousands of towns were doing the same thing. Those who weren't in uniform knew that home defense was their responsibility, and they were stepping up to the plate.

Washington, DC

"Mr. President," the Secretary of the Treasury, Dan Grover, greeted his boss.

"Dan, sit over here next to me, please," Farnham instructed. "The rest of you have the Secretary's proposal for the new currency in the folders in front of you. The Secretary will now explain his proposal. Dan?"

Dan Grover stood so he would be able to more easily make eye-contact with the rest of the room. "The folders before you have full-color illustrations of the new currency to replace the current series. We plan to issue the new currency as soon as the Mint can get enough printed to fully replace the existing stock. We will issue the new currency, and all old currency entering any of our member banks will be destroyed and replaced by the new currency. About 30 days after issuance, all the old currency will become valueless — we will not redeem it for value. Holders of old style currency will have that long to turn in the old and get it replaced by new, or put it into their scrapbooks as curiosities.

"The reason for this change-over is, of course, to deny the Constitutional Alliance the liquidity that is associated with our currency. Stocks of old-style currency from the break-away states will not, of course, be exchanged since we now have no banking connections with them. The new currency, called the Amer, is, as you can see, adorned with the traditional portraits of former Presidents. It is thought that this will make acceptance of the new specie more likely: it will seem to the holders to be a mere adjustment to the older greenbacks. Questions?"

"I presume the new currency is issued at par with the old?" the Secretary of Energy asked.

"That is correct. One dollar equals one Amer," Grover confirmed.

"What about foreigners holding dollars?" the Secretary of State asked.

"Well, if they're holding physical paper dollars, they can surrender it at any American Embassy, and we will issue an American-denominated check to the financial institution of their choice. That's the same system we're going to use for foreign governments holding dollar-denominated funds."

A frown crossed the face of the Secretary of State. "But anybody holding physical paper dollars is most likely holding it in that form because they don't want to deal with banks. Otherwise, it would be in an account earning interest. What of those people?"

"I have no interest in those people," Grover scoffed. "Anyone who's that paranoid is certainly outside the mainstream. Why are we worrying about them? They do enough worrying on their own."

"That's an awfully callous attitude to take, isn't it?" the Secretary of State retorted.

"They don't pay my salary," Grover responded with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I don't have to care about hurting their feelings. I just have to treat them fairly. If they don't want to deal with a bank, they're probably hiding something or trying to."

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The Federal Aviation Administration had summarily canceled all flight plans originating in or destined for any of the thirteen states of the Constitutional Alliance. The Alliance was now cut off from the rest of the formerly-United-States, at least by air. Troops on the border between the Alliance and the rest of the country handled the road traffic and, for the most part, merely gave those who were trying to make the transit a hard time, exemplified by in-depth inspections of vehicles and persons. As a rule, it was easier to enter the Alliance than it was to leave it, but there were crossing points that violated this precept, notably by being more strict about those entering Alliance territory than by being less strict on those leaving it.

Curiously, non-stop flights, as from Chicago to Los Angeles were not affected. Presumably, the FAA was expecting Air Traffic Controllers to safely handle traffic passing through even though their own airports couldn't originate a flight to either of those cities. This was not a situation that could long endure.

Buddy Tyler was delegated to send the bad news. He was actually looking forward to it. His secretary dialed the FAA in Washington DC. At least there was still telephone communication.

"Good morning. Governor Tyler of Arizona is calling to speak with the Administrator."

"One moment, please," the operator informed her. "I'll connect you with the Administrator's office." There was a small pause while the connection was made.

"Administrator Purcell's office," a secretarial voice announced, "How may I direct your call?"

"Good morning. This is Doris Collins, secretary for Governor Buddy Tyler of Arizona. The Governor wishes to speak with Mr. Purcell."

"One moment, please, while I connect you."

By the time Dan Purcell had picked up his phone, Doris had handed off the call to her boss. "Governor Tyler?" Purcell inquired when he picked up the handset.

"Good morning, Dan. Buddy Tyler here. This is, as you might imagine, an official call. I'm calling about the rule issued yesterday canceling all flights to or from our airports — when I say 'our', I'm speaking of and for and with the authority of the Constitutional Alliance. Am I speaking to the right person?"

"Well, sort of, Governor Tyler," Purcell began. "However, I want you to understand that had I been making the decisions, that order would not have gone out."

"I appreciate that sentiment, Dan, but regardless who is responsible for the order, the consequences are the same," Tyler responded. "I have been authorized to warn you that effective noon Central Time today, no non-stop overflights will be permitted to travel through the states of the Alliance. All flights intending to pass over Alliance territory must put down at an intermediate airport within the control of the Alliance for inspection of cargo and passengers. Anything appearing to be war materiel will be confiscated, and the passengers on such flights will be interned. No military personnel will be permitted to transit, nor may employees of the federal government." He paused to let Dan Purcell respond.

"I can't say that I'm surprised by that, Governor. In fact, I warned the President that there would be a negative reaction. May I ask, purely out of curiosity, whether you are prepared to bring down commercial passenger aircraft by force?"

"I have no instructions on that topic, Dan," Buddy Tyler confided. "Let's just hope that the issue never needs to be raised, shall we? I will say that, knowing what I know about Doug Farnham, I think we need to be prepared for the worst, wouldn't you agree?"

"Unfortunately, Governor Tyler, I must agree. I wish for all the world we could find an alternative solution to the present difficulty, but I really believe we'll have to wait for the next President to implement it."

"I think, Dan, that we're on the same page," Buddy Tyler concluded. "I trust you to do whatever you can to make this as painless as possible. Nobody out here in the Alliance expected this to devolve so rapidly and so dangerously. I believe most of us thought the Eastern Establishment just needed a slap in the face to bring them to their senses. It looks like we were wrong. They needed much more than just a slap. We will have no choice but to satisfy their craving. It makes me very sad."

"Governor Tyler—"

"Dan," Buddy Tyler interrupted. "I really wish you'd call me 'Buddy'. Everybody else does. We're on different sides of the border and possibly of the issues, but we're not enemies. I suspect, in fact, that we're far from it."

"I have no doubt, Buddy, that we're closer to 'friend' than we are to 'enemy'," Purcell answered. "I really wish you all the best, even though I think you picked the worst possible issue on which to make your stand. Nevertheless, I have a job to do here, and I have to do it. I'm charged with keeping the flying public safe. I appreciate you taking the time to call and let me know ahead of time what is likely to happen because of our actions, but I can't help hoping that the Alliance will be exercising all the restraint I would in similar circumstances. Do you think that may be a vain hope, Buddy?"

"To be honest, Dan," Tyler mused, "I don't know, but you can count on me applying all the pressure I'm capable of to see that your faith in us is not shattered."

"A pleasure talking with you, Governor."

"Likewise, Dan." The line disconnected.

Dan Purcell buzzed his secretary. "Lisa, please get The White House on the line."

Moments later, he was on the line with the Chief of Staff. "We knew there would be blowback. It looks like we got it. Tell the President the Alliance will no longer allow non-stop overflights."

"What are they going to do?" the Chief of Staff asked, "Shoot them down?"

"I was told 'only if necessary'," Purcell told him.

"They wouldn't dare," the Chief of Staff chortled.

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"United 3-9-1 heavy, Denver" the radio crackled.

"United 3-9-1, go ahead, Denver," the pilot replied.

"3-9-1 cleared direct Denver, descend and maintain 1-2-thousand, course 2-7-5. The Denver altimeter is two niner niner two," ATC ordered.

"Denver, United 3-9-1, are we landing?" the pilot asked wonderingly.

"3-9-1, affirmative," ATC told him. "Begin your descent into Denver."

The pilot paused briefly, then keyed the microphone: "United 3-9-1, standby."

The pilot turned to the co-pilot: "Get on the horn to Chicago. Find out what's going on."

After a few moments the co-pilot announced: "Chicago says we should ignore the diversion and continue on to San Francisco."

The pilot keyed the microphone: "Denver, United 3-9-1."

"3-9-1, go," he heard from ATC.

"3-9-1," the pilot continued, "We are advised by our company to bypass Denver and continue to San Francisco as our flight plan specifies. Maintaining flight level 3-6-0, course 2-5-0."

"United 3-9-1," the ATC broke in, "Landing at Denver is not optional. We will hand you off to the Air National Guard unless you begin descent and course 2-7-5."

In the control room, lit dimly to maximize visibility on the console displays, another controller reported: "3-9-1 is holding altitude on 2-5-0 degrees."

"Pursuit, we have a runner," the controller told the Air National Guard controllers. "Boeing 757 76 miles east of Denver Center, flight level 3-6-0, course 2-5-0 degrees."

"Roger that," came the reply, then the Air National Guard controller switched to his dispatch frequency. "Intercept 8, I have traffic for you: vector 1-6-5, Boeing 757 with passengers refusing to put down at Denver. Handle."

"Intercept 8, we're on our way." Two F-15s turned to course 165° and sped away in United 391's direction. Seven minutes later, they took up a parallel course with one five miles behind while the other sprinted forward to bring himself abreast of the 757's cockpit. With the cockpit crew visible to him and he to them, he keyed his microphone:

"United 3-9-1, I have orders to escort you to Denver. Will you comply?"

"This is air piracy, pilot," the 757's pilot angrily announced. "You're violating international law. Break off your attack."

The F-15 fired a burst from its 20mm cannons. Every passenger on the starboard side of the aircraft could see and hear the action. "United 3-9-1, begin your descent into Denver, or you will be fired upon."

"Go ahead and shoot," the 757's pilot dared him. "You'll be at war with every NATO nation by morning."

But rather than shoot at the aircraft itself, the F-15 pilot accelerated out in front of the 757's right wing and let off another burst from the 20mm cannons. Some of the ejected brass casings were sucked into the starboard engine nicking, cracking, and fracturing several of the vanes in the engine, throwing it out of balance and causing it to shake violently. The pilot was forced to shut it down before it shook the right wing to pieces. Now propelled by only one engine, and faced with the threat of 'no engines', the 757's pilot had no choice but to turn toward Denver and descend.

In Chicago, executives at United Airlines reported to the FAA in Washington that United 391, Chicago to San Francisco non-stop, had been diverted to Denver after suffering damage to its starboard engine.

"Was it fired upon?" the FAA manager asked.

"Yes and no," the United executive responded. "It appears the damage came from ingested brass shell casings, but no bullets were actually fired upon the aircraft itself."

In the Colorado Governor's office, phones began to ring. "Governor," Burt Maxwell's secretary informed him, "FAA on line 1."

Maxwell picked up the phone. "Governor Maxwell," he announced himself.

"George Blaise, FAA, Washington," the other voice announced. "Governor, we have credible reports of a commercial passenger aircraft *en route* Chicago to San Francisco shot down by Colorado Air National Guard aircraft. This is a most serious offense against international law. What can you tell me about the safety of the passengers, Governor?"

"Mr. Blaise," Maxwell responded, "the aircraft was not shot down. The aircraft experienced engine trouble and landed at the nearest appropriate facility, Denver. There, repairs will be made to the aircraft if the proper parts are available. I should tell you, Mr. Blaise, that it is very likely proper parts will not be available until your government lifts the *de facto* embargo they have imposed upon us. I suppose you already know, Mr. Blaise, that an embargo is in itself an act of war?"

"No, Governor, I was unaware of that," Blaise answered, "but I'll have my staff check into it. In the meantime, I'd like to know if there were any casualties on board the aircraft."

"To my knowledge, Mr. Blaise, all the passengers and crew are safely on the ground. However, since there is no longer any regularly scheduled air traffic between here and San Francisco, I suspect they will be here for a very long time, at least until normal relations resume."

"I'm prepared to send a plane to Denver to pick up the passengers and crew and bring them to San Francisco," Blaise continued, "if that's alright with you."

"Why, Mr. Blaise!" Burt Maxwell exclaimed, a clear note of surprise in his voice, "Is it not current FAA policy that no flights may originate or terminate in Alliance territory? How will you manage that?" Blaise could hear the unvoiced laughter in Maxwell's tone.

"We're the FAA, Governor," Blaise shot back. "We make the rules."

"And that, Mr. Blaise, is why you are on one side of a border and I am on the other. People do not exist to serve the purposes of the government, Mr. Blaise. The government exists to serve the purposes of the people. I'm afraid we simply cannot allow you to violate rules to which your own citizens are subject. No, you may not send a plane for these stranded passengers until anyone who lives in Ohio can fly to Wyoming. Mr. Blaise, call back anytime." Maxwell hung up the phone.

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General Gates' order to the Arkansas National Guard to prepare for an invasion of Mississippi was met with a curt refusal. The actual conversation was not recorded, but those who claim to have been there reported that the tone of the conversation was very much less than professional. Louisiana, likewise, declined to be involved in an invasion of a neighboring state. When Tennessee and Georgia balked at being drawn into an internecine struggle, only Florida was left as a staging ground for a push into Alabama. Such a short border was too easy to defend, Gates told his President. An attack from Florida into Alabama would be ruinous. Farnham was livid.

"Replace their officers!" he ordered.

"We can't," Gates told him. "Appointing officers and, presumably, replacing them, is a power of the state governments, not the federal government. If these officers are refusing deployments, it can only be with the tacit approval of their governors. They know that if you order them replaced, their governors will just replace them with other officers who have the same mind-set. You've got a full-blown rebellion on your hands, Mr. President."

11 - Sabers Rattling

The New York Times ran one of its very rare 4-color front pages to show the designs for the new currency scheduled to roll out that day. The banks, of course, had already seen them, having had possession of large stocks of bills for several days.

Major banks around the globe had already been warned of the roll-out and had carefully inventoried their stock of U.S. paper currency so that they could advise the U.S. Mint regarding the quantity of paper specie they would be converting. Sufficient stock had been transferred overseas to more-than-meet the expected demand.

By and large, foreign governments approved of the change-over because the net effect of invalidating all the paper currency in the Constitutional Alliance was to make the rest of it that much more valuable. There was some fussing that the exchange rate between the dollar/Amer and other currencies did not appear to change despite this.

Reaction in the Constitutional Alliance was predictably severe. A change this large was impossible to keep under wraps, and news of it leaked early. At first, it was thought that it might be possible to gather the existing stocks of paper currency in Alliance banks and ship it north into Canada where it could be exchanged by Canadian banks for the newer versions, but the Canadian banks were forbidden by Ottawa to get involved in the issue. Besides, the enormity of planning for such a task was beyond the capabilities of the Alliance. They had been outfoxed. This was a master stroke, and they had no answer for it.

They could, however, continue to use the old-style currency until it wore out, as paper money did over time. In the meantime, plans were afoot to replace it with Alliance currency now being designed at a furious pace.

While most of the world stood to profit from the changeover from the dollar to the Amer, one group of nations had learned over the past several decades to always look at the big picture. OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, saw the civil war in the United States as a non-event: both sides would still have a demand, perhaps an increased demand, for their products.

Now, however, the change in the nature of that war from 'military' to 'economic' meant that a large segment of their potential market had just been rendered penniless, almost literally.

Prince Hassan ibn Saud leaned back into his chair and breathed heavily into his tented hands. Four of his largest tankers were now either in or headed for ports in the Alliance. The oil they contained was worth millions of dollars — Amers, he corrected himself — and those accounts would be settled in U.S. dollars that were soon to be worthless paper. That is, that paper would soon be more worthless than it was two weeks ago.

His father, in the days when he was handing over to his son the office of Minister for Commerce, had warned him on several occasions against relying on the steadily devaluating American currency, and now here he was looking straight in the eye at the very thing of which his father had spoken. True, the Amers with which Washington was paying for East Coast shipments were worth more, in a practical sense, than their dollar counterparts of a few weeks ago. That up-tick was more than countered by the monstrous down-tick of losing a very large slice of their former market, including the bulk of North America's refining capability. How to deal with this?

He picked up the phone and called his sales agent in Houston.

"Tell the Americans we want payment in cash," he insisted. "That will stave off the inevitable for a few weeks at least, until we can figure something out."

"It will be done, Your Highness," the agent assured him.

The greenback dollars would be floated to the Royal Bank and redeemed by Washington for Amers, but there was a limit to how long that game could be played. No, he admitted to himself, if Washington was going to be that vindictive, almost anyone could be next, and he wasn't at all convinced that he was sufficiently protected from the wrath of Douglas Farnham and his lackeys. Pricing oil in Euros was always an option... of sorts... When the Iraqis changed their oil prices from dollars to Euros, they found themselves an occupied country and were still not entirely free of Washington's favors even now. On the other hand, U.S. forces were stretched so thin (his advisers told him) that they couldn't successfully invade Liechtenstein. Perhaps this was his golden opportunity. But he would wait until the end of the thirty-day redemption period. No sense buying trouble.

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Pete Shipwell had been Texas' Lieutenant Governor and a staunch opponent of secession. He and Bill Mitchum had nearly come to blows over the issue, and he had been on the verge of submitting his resignation when a Tomahawk missile promoted him to Governor. The event had also changed his attitude toward the Formerly-United States literally overnight. Now he made Mitchum's hard-nosedness

seem tame. When the Alliance made the decision not to allow non-stop overflights, Shipwell ordered the Texas Air National Guard to shoot down any aircraft entering Texas' airspace without a flight plan showing a scheduled stop inside the Alliance. The Brigadier in charge of the Texas Guard quietly rescinded that order. Few if any of the pilots would have carried it out in any case.

Shipwell sat at his desk and wondered how he had managed to get where he was and have the opinions he had. He felt as though some magical hand was pushing him in directions he didn't want to go, and he had not the strength to resist. His secretary buzzed his phone and Shipwell picked it up.

"The Venezuelan Embassy is calling to speak to you," she told him, sounding for all the world as if she didn't believe it herself.

"The Venezuelan Embassy' where?" he asked.

"They didn't say. Washington, I guess," she replied.

"Put it through," he instructed. She connected the call.

"Governor Shipwell," a soft voice but with a heavy Spanish accent greeted him, "I am Señora Elena Conway, Venezuela's Ambassador to the United States."

"This is a very great honor, Embajadora Conway," Shipwell responded. "What is it that prompts your call?"

"As you are probably aware, Governor Shipwell," Conway began, "Venezuela is a member of OPEC." She waited for Shipwell to acknowledge this, but hearing nothing from the other end of the phone, continued: "As such, we are in constant communication with other members of the Organization.

"Recently, we have become aware that the Saudis, who supply the bulk of the oil processed in Texas, have become gun-shy over the issue of how you will pay them for future shipments." Shipwell gritted his teeth at the unpleasant thought that Texas' refineries might soon go idle. "You are probably also aware that Venezuela's refineries are older and lack the finesse of those plants along the Gulf coast."

Shipwell held his breath. Was she leading up to saying what he hoped? He held his tongue and let her continue.

"Also, in recent years, Venezuela has taken on the task of refining for several other South American nations, and this has put something of a strain on our capacity. In addition, we cannot give our customers poorer service than we give ourselves. As a result, the quality of refined oil outputs in Venezuela itself is, at best, merely comparable to the output of those Texas refineries and, at worst, is charitably called 'marginal'. We — Venezuela — would like to change that, and in view of the Saudi reluctance to deal with you, I have been asked by my government to offer you a deal. Venezuela would like you — that is, Texas — to be our refiner of choice. We propose to

route two million barrels per day of Venezuelan oil or oil from other sources to your refineries. You will refine it and return it, keeping a portion for your efforts. That, Governor, is the executive overview. Does this seem like an area where we might have a business relationship?"

Shipwell was almost weeping with joy. Just this week the Saudis had informed him that some other method of payment would have to be worked out once their greenback dollars became obsolete. He thought the Alliance might be on the verge of financial collapse which would mean the end of the independence movement and certainly charges of treason for himself and all the other Governors, along with thousands of others. If this could be made to work, Texans would have work, the Alliance would have desperately needed fuel, and hundreds of Alliance industries would have the raw materials to continue operations. The Alliance would have a reasonable chance of survival. With a colossal effort, he got himself under control.

"Señora Embajadora," Shipwell answered, "this sounds like an ideal match, Venezuelan oil and Texan refineries. I would like to consult with the other members of our Alliance, but I feel certain they will view this as favorably as I do. I'm sure we ought to put your staff and mine together so that they can work out the fine details. When do you think that ought to happen?"

"I think we should plan on sometime early next week," she answered. "I will let my government know that you were receptive to the idea. Our senior staff will then fly up from Caracas, and we can begin 'working out the details' as you say."

When the call was finished, Shipwell had his secretary set up a conference call with all the other Governors.

It was late in the day before all the Alliance Governors were able to find free time for a non-emergency conference call. Shipwell, as the one calling the conference, did the initial briefing.

"Venezuela's ambassador called me on the phone this morning," he began. "She had an attractive offer: she wants Texas to take up the slack — actually, more than just slack — in Venezuela's oil refining capacity in exchange for a cut off the top. This would alleviate the upcoming problems with the Saudis, our traditional source of crude oil. I'm inclined to go for it, and I wanted to hear your opinions. Does anyone have strong feelings as to why we ought not take her up on this offer?"

Before anyone could offer their reasons why or why not, Emerson Stenbridge, Governor of Vermont, interrupted.

"Pete, why are you asking us? Those refineries you're talking about are all in Texas. If you're asking anyone, shouldn't it be the

people who own those refineries? I thought the whole purpose of the Constitutional Alliance was to get big, overweening government off the backs of the states and their people. This sounds to me like a question nobody outside of Texas should have a say in."

Some of the governors clapped, and the sound could be heard indistinctly by all.

"That's an excellent point, Emerson," Shipwell responded, "but I'm asking because traditionally Venezuela has not been considered a friendly nation. It has long been Socialist and somewhat antagonistic to the United States. Because of that, I felt it prudent to run this by you all. We are, after all, in this together."

Constance Broadley jumped in. "Pete, I think we shouldn't turn down a business deal just because it's offered to us by a traditional enemy, even though I think 'enemy' is the wrong word to use here. The Venezuelans were antagonistic because of the United States' antagonistic foreign policy — a policy which we have rejected, implicitly, and which our defections have made more difficult for those remaining states to continue. Socialist or not, Venezuela probably now sees us as more of an ally than any of the states have ever been. They want us to succeed because, if we fail the *status quo ante* returns, and they don't want that. I see no reason — none whatsoever — to object to this."

"I agree 100 percent," Burt Maxwell added. "And there's another reason you ought to encourage this, Pete," he continued. "When countries that once were traditional enemies see that we are open to mutually beneficial trade, we may have more business from unexpected quarters. Far from getting our OK on this, I actually think you can't turn this down. This is a chance we can't miss. In fact, I may send a representative down there to chat with your emissaries after you're done with them. Who knows what other business deals might be in the making?"

There was a muttering of approval from the others, and the conference ended with Pete Shipwell thanking them all for their help in making his decision. His commerce staffers had already begun alerting the oil companies who managed the refineries strung along the Gulf coast from Freeport to Port Arthur. Things were going to work out.

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The double-hull tanker Songa Jane, too large in every dimension for the Suez Canal, had come around the Cape of Good Hope on her way to Houston, Texas from her loading point, Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. Her course took her between Tobago and

Grenada in the Windward Islands, south of Jamaica, and through the pass between Cuba and the Yucatan Peninsula into the Gulf of Mexico.

Songa Jane was half-way through the Gulf of Mexico when four U.S. Navy destroyers overtook her. There was no question whether the Songa Jane might ignore their demands that she heave-to for boarding. Her captain complied immediately. Before she had come to rest, both the ship's owners, Tankers International, and the Exxon Traffic Department in Houston already knew. Phones rang in Austin.

"Governor, Mr. Childress of Exxon is on the line for you," Shipwell's secretary informed him. Pete Shipwell snapped the phone out of its cradle, anxious to talk to his classmate from Texas A&M.

"Darrell, how the hell are you?" Shipwell greeted him effusively.

"Things are not very happy here in Houston, Pete," Childress admitted. "We've just received word from TI Songa Jane *en route* to our port in Baytown from Ras Tanura. Songa Jane has been intercepted by U.S. Navy warships and it appears they intend to prevent her reaching Texas. We're being blockaded, Pete. They're cutting off our supply lines. They mean to starve us out. Just thought you'd like to know."

"When did this happen, Darrell?" Shipwell probed.

"It's probably happening right now," Childress mused. "It takes near half-an-hour to get one of those things stopped and we just heard about it a few minutes ago. It's possible the Navy hasn't even boarded her yet."

"OK, Darrell, keep me informed of anything you hear. I'm going to consult with the other Governors."

"Will do, Pete. Good luck." Childress hung up.

Shipwell buzzed his secretary, Joyce Crispin, who had just barely survived the attack that had killed her boss, Governor Bill Mitchum. "Joyce, get Brigadier Carter for me, and then set up an emergency conference with the other Governors." In under two minutes, Shipwell was conversing with Harlan Carter, head of all Texas Air National Guard forces.

Good morning, Governor," Carter greeted him. "What can I do for you?"

"General," Shipwell began his briefing, "I've just spoken with Darrell Childress at Exxon in Houston, and he informed me that several U.S. Navy warships have intercepted a tanker bound for Houston. General, is there anything we can do about that?"

"I can put up a flock of 'bones', but I sure wouldn't want to be shooting at warships if they're close aboard a supertanker. I presume we *are* talking about a supertanker here, is that correct, Sir?"

"I believe that's correct, General. Childress identified it as TI Songa Jane. Tankers International doesn't do anything small. It's two million barrels, minimum, but I'm guessing."

"That's not good news, Governor. We can mount an attack and guarantee you that there won't be anything afloat when we're done, but I don't believe that's what you're asking. We would have to get very lucky to rescue Songa Jane without spilling lots and lots of oil."

"No, General, that wouldn't be a good thing. Any other options?" Shipwell asked hopefully.

"Nothing we can field on this short notice, Governor. We could paste a land-based target — Little Rock, say — but given the recent incident where Arkansas balked at invading Mississippi, I don't think that would be a good move, either tactically or strategically."

"Well, thank you for your input, General," Shipwell concluded. "I'll keep you apprised of developments."

Joyce Crispin buzzed in. "The other governors are assembling now, governor."

It was a matter of only a few minutes before the other Governors were hooked together for this emergency conference call. Shipwell began the briefing:

"I have it on good authority that a U.S. Navy patrol has intercepted TI Songa Jane, a supertanker in the 2-million-barrel class out of Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia, and is diverting it from its destination, Houston, Texas. I've spoken to the Texas Air National Guard, and they advise there's nothing practical they can do to stop it. We're being blockaded. The immediate problem is that the same danger applies to our Venezuelan oil, the first shipment of which will be transiting the Gulf of Mexico in two days' time. It appears well within the capability of the U.S. Navy to completely deprive us of anything that arrives by ship. I suppose I don't have to elaborate on the consequences of letting that happen. Suggestions?"

Buddy Tyler offered the first response: "I spoke last week with someone from the FAA — Blaise, I think his name was — and I made known to him that an embargo such as the Eastern states imposed on us by preventing air travel into or out of our territory is an Act of War under international law. Apparently, they didn't get the message. Should we consider giving them a booster shot?"

"Pete, this is Gloria Talamanco," the Governor of Idaho began, "I think it's time we formalized the state of war that exists between us and the Eastern states. They clearly want a war, and it's equally clear that we can't avoid going to war with them. They're going to push us and push us, the same way FDR pushed the Japanese. We shouldn't, however, do what the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor. We need to give

them a formal declaration of war and then a *'smack upside the head with a two-by-four'*. I'm not sure, myself, what form that might take, but we need to start thinking along those lines."

In her office in Helena, Constance Broadley motioned one of her advisers to her side and whispered to him: "Do we have anything available?"

"I'll check right away."

At Malmstrom AFB, Brevet Brigadier General Rod Calhoun picked up the phone and listened to the Governor's aide explain the situation. At one point, he covered the mouthpiece and whispered to his own aide: "Get Captain Winstead," then returned his attention to the telephone.

"How much time do we have?" Calhoun asked the Governor's aide.

"Off the record?" the aide queried.

"I can handle that," Calhoun assured him.

"The governors — one of them, anyway — said the word 'war' —"

"Well, shit," Calhoun bellowed, "what do they call this? If this isn't war, what is it? Do we have to be actively bombing each other's infrastructure before they call it 'war'? The Easterners are hijacking ships on the high seas and blockading our commerce. Those are, themselves, acts of war. Of course we're at war!"

"So, do you have any suggestions as to how we could respond to that? That's really what Broadley needs to hear."

"I'm working on it. Hold on a minute." Calhoun's aide entered with Captain Timothy Winstead, the officer who had offered to unlock the silos should the occasion warrant. Calhoun pushed the 'speaker' button and continued, speaking now at the device instead of into it. "I have here Captain Winstead who has the launch codes for our silos. Give me a moment to brief him on the day's events... or would you rather do it? Your knowledge is probably more detailed than mine."

"A pleasure, Brigadier," Broadley's aide began. "Captain Winstead, I am Harvey McEntaggart, on Governor Constance Broadley's staff. At this very moment the Governor is on a conference call with the other governors in the Constitutional Alliance. They are discussing their options for responding to an incident that happened less than an hour ago. Warships of the U.S. Navy have seized an oil tanker headed for Texas and appear to be diverting it in an attempt to deny us fuel. You may be aware that this is, in itself, an act of war, and the governors may be forced to respond in-kind. I'm not sure what Brigadier Calhoun's intent is in bringing you into this discussion

since I am very certain the governors would not launch a nuclear attack over an incident of this magnitude."

"Not all of our capability at Malmstrom is nuclear, Mr. McEntaggart," Winstead interrupted. "We have a substantial non-nuclear capability as well. Perhaps our attention ought to be focused there."

"What sort of non-nuclear capability?" McEntaggart asked.

"There are several forms of cruise missile, and I'm certain we have conventional packages for the ICBMs, although I don't know if any of them are currently mounted."

"Could we, for instance," McEntaggart asked dreamily, "drop one on, say, Linden, New Jersey? That's where the bulk of the East's refining capacity is centered."

"Linden, New Jersey?" Winstead asked. "That's a pretty big target. What's the street address?"

"You can drop one on a specific address?" McEntaggart asked incredulously.

"No," Winstead clarified, "but I can put it inside a nine-digit ZipCode. I may not hit the mailbox, but the neighbors are going to be pissed."

"Well, Captain," McEntaggart assured him, "hitting anywhere in Linden is certainly going to piss off the neighbors. How soon can we deliver this message?"

Calhoun looked at Winstead and Winstead nodded. "We'll get started right away, Harvey, and let you know when we're ready. How about that?"

"Perfect," McEntaggart chortled. "I'll let the governors know this is an available option. Don't, of course, launch without specific orders to do so."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Calhoun agreed. "Talk to you later." and he pushed the 'disconnect' button.

Winstead, with a quick inquiry to the database, discovered that none of the silos had conventional packages mounted. In fact, only three silos had any sort of warhead at all. The database also revealed that the inventory of conventional warheads was adequate to cause years of consternation to the formerly-United States of America. There was, as well, enough nuclear material to liquefy the Western Hemisphere, not that Winstead would ever seriously consider allowing them to be launched. Still, circumstances could change.

He selected a single 8,000 pound warhead and directed the fork lift driver to retrieve it. The crew escorted it to a silo whose missile had as yet no warhead and together they mounted the package and prepared it for launch.

Captain Winstead verified that the installation had been done correctly, then picked up the telephone handset from the wall-mounted cradle. He dialed the General's office from memory. "Silo 8-E is tasked on Linden, New Jersey, with an 8,000 pound conventional warhead, sir. Launch controls are locked and waiting on orders."

Harvey McEntaggart re-entered the room where Constance Broadley was still listening to the other governors and made an "OK" hand gesture in her direction. She waved him closer.

"What?" she asked expectantly.

"Calhoun says he can put a conventional payload on any target as big as a city block. All you have to do is tell him which block."

Constance Broadley broke in to the ongoing conversation: "If you'll excuse me —" The conversation quieted immediately. "Malmstrom says they can deliver any message we need delivered with enough precision that the meaning will be clear."

"A nuke?" Emerson Stembridge inquired with a distinct note of trepidation in his voice.

"I think we're not yet at the nuke stage, Emerson," Broadley comforted him. "But even a conventional warhead will get the message across."

"Even so," Stembridge continued, "I think we should try talking to Farnham before resorting to violence. Those warships are still in the company of that tanker, so we don't even yet know if their intentions are hostile."

There was an audible snicker, but there was no indication as to which of the governors had issued it.

"Suppose we escalate this immediately," Gloria Talamanco suggested, "by patching Farnham into this conversation? Then we can ask him directly whether he wishes to be involved in a shooting war."

Joyce Crispin put herself on "hold" and began dialing the White House. It connected almost immediately. "Governor Pete Shipwell of Texas wishes to speak directly with the President. I'll hold."

On the governors' conference call a lively exchange on the probability of surviving an all-out war with the Eastern states was in progress when Joyce Crispin announced: "I have the President on the line." At a signal she patched him in.

"President Farnham, you are now in conference with the thirteen governors," she informed him.

"President Farnham," Pete Shipwell began, "U.S. Navy warships have intercepted in international waters a vessel bound for Texas. Are you aware of this, Mr. President?"

"I am aware of this, yes," Farnham confirmed.

"We are curious to know your intentions in this matter, Mr. President. Can you share those with us?"

"Those warships are merely inspecting the ship for the presence of contraband," Farnham told them.

"I have to tell you, Doug," Constance Broadley spoke up, "that we governors consider this an act of war. It is, beyond that, extraordinarily arrogant that you should presume to tell us what we may or may not import. I think that we are very close to a formal declaration of war. Are you amenable to a peaceful solution, or do we need to escalate this?"

"As long as your thirteen states are in rebellion," Farnham replied, "I don't see how a peaceful solution might be in the cards. I ask you in return whether you are prepared to give up this rebellion and return to the United States?"

"You may recall, Doug, that this rebellion arose over the issue of the federal government presuming to use more power than the Constitution grants it," Burt Maxwell interjected. "Any intellectually honest person must admit that we have a point, so the obvious question is: are you intellectually honest, Doug? Are you ready to promise that the federal government will resume only its constitutionally-permitted functions? Are you and the Congress ready to repeal all the unconstitutional laws that have been enacted in the past hundred-fifty-some-odd years? Your answer to those questions is our answer to your question."

"The United States is what the United States is," Farnham answered, as if that were all the explanation anyone might need. "Take it or leave it."

"Leave it," Emerson Stembridge offered.

"Leave it," twelve other governors asserted in turn.

Pete Shipwell broke in: "We require that you order your vessels to break off their piratical attack on peaceful shipping in international waters —"

"I am the President of the United States," Farnham stopped Shipwell's tirade. "I will do what I damn well please, and you can stick your threats where the Sun don't shine," and without waiting for a response, Doug Farnham hung up his phone and disconnected from the conference.

12 - Toe To Toe

Thirteen governors appeared almost simultaneously before joint sessions of their legislatures to brief them on the situation. Thirteen governors then asked those legislatures to issue declarations of war, and thirteen legislatures, some with reluctance, others with gusto, approved the requests.

There was no need to print it out and sign it as in 1776. In this age of instant everything, everyone who ought to know knew within minutes of it happening, but the governors held press conferences anyway. Reporters always wanted to ask questions directly even if the answers would be obvious to all but idiots.

All of the governors emphasized, because they had all agreed to present a united front, that they, the states of the Constitutional Alliance, would have preferred a peaceful solution, but that it was the United States government initiating violence, first by forcibly trying to retake the bases 'liberated' by the Alliance, then by infantry assaults in Oregon and California, and then by embargoing shipping to the Alliance. To those who pointed out that the seizing of dozens of military bases by the Alliance almost certainly constituted violence, the rebuttal was that it had all happened without a single casualty on either side, all those bases were, by the way, originally property of the states, and they merely recovered what was always theirs.

This declaration of war was not so much a warning of impending violence as it was a recognition of an already-existing condition. Like it or not, the Alliance and the Eastern States had been at war now for weeks.

Each governor ended their press conference by inviting the people of the United States to end the war and minimize the casualties among a population that, until recently, had been brothers.

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At the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, headquarters of NORAD since abandoning Cheyenne Mountain, security had been as tight as it would have been in an actual shooting war. This was, in fact, the only U.S. military installation in the thirteen states that had not fallen to local forces either on the actual day or in the weeks following, and despite repeated demands for their surrender, the base had remained in the hands of staff loyal to the Eastern States.

Now Burt Maxwell had ordered his troops to put it out of business. Over the past several weeks, virtually all of the external radar units had been identified, communications channels, both wired and wireless, had been inventoried, and plans laid to render them inoperable. The 'last chance' ultimatum had been delivered a full week prior but had not been acted upon — yet.

A shipment of nerve gas agents — that, officially, did not exist — had been brought up from Ft. Huachuca in Arizona. The technicians accompanying it assured the Colorado Guard that NORAD would not exist, for all practical purposes, before sunset.

The first phase of the operation was to blind all video and other equipment that could monitor the grounds. That had been taken care of within the first six hours after NORAD had 'buttoned up'. NORAD had been blind, in that regard, for weeks if, in fact, all of the monitors had been zapped.

The second phase was to cut power to all the radar units that scanned the skies over the thirteen states and to cut the communications lines into and out of NORAD. That had happened within two hours of Maxwell's order the prior evening.

The last phase was to disable — in this case, permanently — all the personnel below ground in their secure bunkers. The odorless, colorless, nearly-undetectable nerve gas would cripple and eventually kill all the staff below, both those who sided with the Constitutional Alliance and those who did not, and since the site was hermetically sealed from within, would render it forever their tomb, more secure than any pharaoh's.

The equipment placed on each air intake had two functions. The first and most important function was to monitor the air flow into the intake. As long as the intake was positive, the second function, dispensing nerve gas into the stream, would be continued. Should the intake ever stop, the flow of nerve gas would also stop. In this way, it was thought that if NORAD had sensors sophisticated enough to detect this nearly-undetectable gas and shut off the intake pumps, only a small quantity of the deadly substance would escape into the atmosphere. Small quantities were not a problem since they would degrade and become harmless in dilution before becoming a danger to the general populace.

Of the 62 fresh air intakes that served NORAD, only two were able to be monitored from below ground. These two were covered by several very-well-hidden cameras, only a few of which had been discovered and disabled. Forty-seven vents that were not monitorable had already been rigged and had started leaking nerve gas into NORAD's breathable air when a security tech noticed activity around one of the fresh air intakes that still had a working camera pointed at

it. The tech notified her senior, and together they watched the activity around the vent pipe. A few moments surveillance sufficed to convince the senior tech to shut down all the fresh air intakes and reprocess the air inside through the CO₂ scrubbers.

It was, however, too little, too late. Over three dozen staff whose work stations were too close to air intakes found themselves stricken with paralysis, unable to move away from the thing that was killing them, unable to phone for help, and soon, unable to breathe. By the time the danger was noticed, thirty-eight corpses had fallen at their desks and fourteen more had passed away in their sleep. Almost everyone else had been exposed to small quantities of the toxin, and many were now reporting headaches and blurred vision along with difficulty concentrating on the tasks at hand. The commanding officer, faced with the imminent death of all under his command, and infuriated that poison gas would be used in violation of long-standing principles of civilized warfare, not to mention such niceties as The Geneva Conventions, grabbed the phone out of its cradle and dialed out to the last number he had for his besiegers. He let the phone ring more than twenty times before concluding those on the outside were not in a talking mood.

He called his senior staff together.

"The Alliance has injected toxic gas into our system and fifty-two are known dead at this moment. Others are reporting symptoms of exposure. The scrubbers will keep us supplied with breathable air for at least two months, possibly more, but the diesel generators require a steady supply of outside air for continued operation. Letting the diesels run, there's a risk of spill-over, a risk that some outside air mixed with toxins will seep into the cavern. It seems to me we're in pretty poor shape. Suggestions?"

The Colonel in charge of base security spoke up: "Are we prepared to either die at our posts or to surrender NORAD? Those seem like the only choices.

"If we hold out to the last man, this base becomes our tomb. It's unlikely anyone can enter it from the outside without effectively destroying it. If we surrender it, we give the Alliance the power of life and death over the United States: they will have early warning of any incoming attacks and will be able to suppress knowledge of outbound attacks. They appear to have blocked all but fragments of our detection capability and all of our communication channels, so half of that is already accomplished: they have suppressed the United States' knowledge of attacks originating here.

"So, the question is: *are our lives worth more or less than allowing them to know of incoming attacks?* The events of the last few weeks lead me to believe they already have a substantial capability to

detect incoming attacks which our deaths will not affect. I hate to sound crass, but holding out here and waiting for suffocation or worse is going to be worth approximately nothing even in the short-run.

"I say, destroy the really critical assets, and march out of here with our heads high."

There was a muttering of broad agreement and one or two who disagreed. They broke out the contingency plan for surrendering the base and began to implement its provisions. The computers were fried electronically by the simple tactic of doing an Emergency Power-Off, an EPO. Then the interior where delicate contacts met even more delicate circuit boards were misted with hydrofluoric acid to render the connectors permanently unusable. The high-capacity disk drives were similarly treated, and the tape library was set ablaze after being sealed off from the rest of the cavern.

The last task was not one that was on the contingency plan but was added *ad hoc* because of the seventy staff still alive that had balked at sealing NORAD. They had made it plain that their loyalties lay with the Alliance, they were considered security risks, and had been locked away in an area suitable for use as a brig. Like the rest of the cavern, the brig's air was now supplied through the CO₂ scrubbers. Before abandoning the main cavern, the air supply to the brig-area was rigged to begin drawing outside air after a quarter-hour delay. Then everyone else evacuated the area which would soon become a killing ground. With everyone assembled at the main entrance, the officers entered the codes to unlock the main doors, and the survivors exited, surrendering a useless pile of trash to the Alliance forces.

All of the radar sites had been disabled — they supposed. Communications to and from the site had been blocked — they sincerely hoped. As far as they could tell, NORAD was defunct, but if they hadn't gotten all the radar sites, if they hadn't found every communications link, they couldn't launch without alarms ringing all over the Eastern seaboard. The people inside had to be eliminated, and that was all there was to it. Two hundred tanks of persimidol-7 were ordered shipped from Arizona to Colorado.

As soon as the gas was flowing into the underground bunkers, Malmstrom went to a war footing. Captain Winstead made a final examination of the rocket and warhead in silo E-8, more to assure himself the warhead hadn't been swapped for something more deadly than for any other purpose.

"Clear to fire E-8," he reported to Launch Control, then locked the silo and entered the cypher to enable the rocket to be fired. Before he had made his way back to Launch Control, he heard the wail of sirens across the base, a signal that a launch was about to happen.

Entering Launch Control, he could feel the ground tremble as a Minuteman rose out of E-8 on its way to New Jersey.

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At 9am the operator at CNN-Atlanta picked up an incoming call.

"This is the office of Governor Constance Broadley in Helena, Montana. The Governor's aide would like to speak with the News Director."

"Right away, ma'am," the operator acknowledged. A moment later the phone on Bob Glisson's desk rang, and he picked it up.

"Glisson," he answered it.

"Mr. McEntaggart with the Montana Governor's Office is on the line for you. Hold, please." A moment later, a different voice spoke: "This is Harvey McEntaggart, aide to Governor Broadley. To whom am I speaking?"

"This is Bob Glisson, Mr. McEntaggart. I'm the News Director for National News. What can I do for you, Mr. McEntaggart?"

"Mr. Glisson, the governors will have an announcement at 10am Eastern Time, and I have called to personally invite you to send a representative to the Governor's Residence to hear it. Other news services have also been invited."

"Is this something we should clear time for, Mr. McEntaggart?", Glisson asked.

Harvey McEntaggart chuckled into the phone. "I'm not in the news business, Mr. Glisson. You'll have to make that decision based on what your reporter reports."

"Does this have a bearing on the recent Declaration of War?" Bob probed.

"I think it would be fair to say that everything that happens over the next few weeks will have some bearing on the state of hostilities, yes," Harvey side-stepped the question. "All will be revealed in one hour."

"We'll be there," Bob assured him.

They disconnected, and Bob immediately dialed the number for Betty Gordon, still on assignment in Montana. He caught her just as she was returning from a morning run. "Well, grab a quick shower and get over to the Governor's Residence," Bob directed over her protest that she was, for the moment, unfit to be with civilized people. "I'll call KTGF and have them meet you there with a crew."

With only eight minutes to spare, Betty Gordon's car whipped into a parking space at the Governor's Residence and she hurried inside still trying to straighten herself up.

The make-up girl, sent along at Bob's request, took one look at her, shook her head and got out her kit. "Hold still," she demanded as she deftly applied powder, lipstick, eye liner, and blush. There was only time for the most basic adjustments before the Governor's Press Secretary entered the room to give the gathered reporters a two-minute warning. Betty let the crew check her sound level, and then the Press Secretary re-entered the room.

"Governor Broadley," he announced, then stepped aside for Constance Broadley to take her position at the lectern.

"Good morning," Broadley began. "This press conference is one of thirteen occurring more-or-less simultaneously within the states of the Constitutional Alliance. I hardly need to brief you on the state of relations between us and the Eastern States, that remnant of what was until recently The United States of America. But let me say, for the benefit of any who may not have heard it before: we, the Constitutional Alliance, merely want to be left alone. It was not, and is not, our desire or intention to control those Eastern States as they so obviously wish to control us.

"You are all probably aware that the day before yesterday, U.S. Navy warships engaged in piracy on the high seas by taking control of an oil tanker, the TI Songa Jane, which was *en route* to Texas. It was this incident that drove us to a formal Declaration of War. You should be aware, as well, that we actually spoke with President Farnham during the incident, and encouraged him to display his willingness to settle this matter peacefully. Douglas Farnham told us, and I quote, to: 'stick [it] where the Sun don't shine', unquote.

"The Governors of the Constitutional Alliance have resolved that the Eastern States will not be permitted to act like this." She looked at her watch.

"Three minutes ago, Malmstrom launched a conventional — that is: non-nuclear — warhead toward a strategic target in the Eastern States —" There was a collective gasp from the audience. "The target was picked to emphasize our resolve that oil must not be used as a weapon. It is our hope that the Eastern States will recognize the seriousness of what they have done, and will conclude that getting into a shooting war over our independence is not going to be worth the inevitable cost.

"I want to re-emphasize that this single warhead is not nuclear. It is a conventional warhead — ordinary explosives. It could have been a nuclear warhead. We have the capability — should it become necessary. This single warhead is the last warning to the Eastern States that they can either live in peace — or in pieces.

"This concludes the announcement. I will now take questions from the floor."

"The target?" the AP reporter called out.

Broadley looked at her watch again. "Ask me later," she suggested.

"Governor, you said you have nuclear capability?" Betty Gordon slipped her question in.

"That's correct, Betty," Broadley answered. "Malmstrom is able to launch anything, anywhere. We chose not to use a more powerful weapon in this instance because the intent is not to cause massive damage, merely to demonstrate that we can retaliate in whatever degree necessary."

"Is there any word on the fate of the TI Songa Jane?", another reporter asked.

"Latest intelligence puts it in the vicinity of Tampa, Florida", Broadley responded. "This puts the lie to Douglas Farnham's contention, when we confronted him over the incident, that the seizure of the ship was merely to check for contraband. You don't have to sail a ship 1,000 miles off its course to check for contraband. Songa Jane has been hijacked in an act of piracy on the high seas."

"When will you be able to tell us the target?" the UPI reporter asked.

Broadley looked again at her watch. It said 8:14. She looked up at the reporter. "The refineries at Linden, New Jersey."

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Kim Pearson had her head down, concentrating with all her might on the math test Miss Tarrant had sprung on them as punishment for all the noise they were making in the hallway between classes at Linden Elementary School. Her classroom faced southeast, and her seat was near enough to the windows that she had a good view of the sky if she looked a little to her left. Something moved in her peripheral vision. She turned her head just in time to watch the warhead explode at a height of eight hundred feet above the Linden Tank Farm two miles away. She screamed and dived out of her seat to the floor. Most of the other students followed her a second later. It was 10:17 AM.

Miss Tarrant screamed "Take cover!" for the benefit of any student who might have been unaware, then crouched behind her own desk.

The shock wave from the explosion crossed the eight hundred feet down to the ground in under a second and split all the tanks for at least a half mile from ground zero. The fluids in the tanks burst into flame. The last thing Kim Pearson saw before her line of sight fell below the window sill was the Linden yards exploding. Eight seconds

later the shock wave smashed into Linden Elementary School blowing in many of the windows along the southeast-facing wall.

With the windows now lying in shards on the floors of classrooms, the students could hear muffled booms as pipelines and other storage facilities burst and exploded from the heat of a sea of burning petroleum. A wave of burning fuel splashed across the New Jersey Turnpike to the northwest where many vehicles had already been overturned by the initial shock wave. In the opposite direction, the first shock wave crushed the left wing of a 737 on final approach into Newark Airport. Terminally unstable, the jet rolled to the left and nosed in just north of the junction of I-278 and I-95, narrowly missing another oil refinery.

Washington, DC

Farnham and his advisers were focused on the big screen television tuned to the Constitutional Alliance Governors' Joint Press Conference. Quiet conversations murmured within the room as questions were asked and answered. There had been no need to place the Armed Forces on alert. They hadn't been off-alert for almost six weeks now. When Constance Broadley announced "Three minutes ago, Malmstrom launched —", the room erupted in gasps.

"Flash alert to all strategic installations — now!" Farnham's National Security Adviser ordered over the telephone connected directly to the Pentagon, then turned his attention back to Governor Broadley.

"When will you be able to tell us the target?" one reporter asked, and Constance Broadly glanced briefly at the watch on her left wrist. "The refineries at Linden, New Jersey," she answered him.

Across the Eastern States, sirens wailed at all the military bases and in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Atlanta, but no one had thought to alert the oil refineries, shipyards, and chemical plants. By the time the warnings got there and were received and reacted-to, the warhead would already have arrived. Many of the advisers exchanged worried looks.

Ottawa

René Lalouche listened to Constance Broadley announce that a missile had been launched, and he started out of his seat. He relaxed only a little when she added that the missile had a conventional warhead.

Kirsten O'Dwyer had not so much as flinched as she listened to what was, by any reckoning, very bad news. "I have the feeling, Minister," she began, "that very many decisions are about to be made for us."

"Indeed, Kirsten," Lalouche replied, "and I don't think any of us are going to like the decisions." He hoisted the telephone handset from its cradle and pushed the speed-dial button for the Foreign Office in London.

Their automated switchboard recognized the origin of the call and routed it directly to the Foreign Minister's office where it was picked up by an executive secretary who lifted the receiver and handed it directly to the Foreign Minister. "Canada," was all he said. The Foreign Minister took the phone.

"This is very bad, René," the Foreign Minister began.

"You're watching, then?" René asked.

"Of course," the FM answered. "Do you know of any hotter hot spots than North America these days?"

"No," René admitted, "and I'm worried it could get hotter — in a nuclear sense."

"Yes, I quite understand," the FM consoled him. "I've summoned the American ambassador for consultation, and I have the PM's permission to inform him that if Farnham responds with nuclear weapons, we will consider it an act of war upon the Commonwealth. I know it's not much, René, but at the moment it's the best we can do."

"I wonder if it will be enough?" René muttered.

"Let's hope for the best, shall we?" the FM invited.

"Yes. Thanks," René answered somberly. "We'll talk again later, I'm sure," and they disconnected.

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Her hands slapped the table — hard! — and she stood, fire in her eyes.

"I absolutely forbid it!" Her voice had that near-hysterical quality that would have been thought screaming in any other context. "When you're eighteen, I won't be able to stop you," she admitted, "but you're not there yet! You are not joining the Army while I still have something to say about it." She turned on her husband, ready for a fight. "Back me up on this, Bob, or we're through. I'm not kidding."

Bob pursed his lips as he thought. *Young Bob's 15th birthday was less than five months away. Was it worth fighting over? Even if he did dig his heels in and sign young Bob's enlistment papers, the fighting would likely be over and done-with before he got a combat*

assignment. On the other hand, combat assignments came in lots of different flavors these days, and young Bob could wind up in some third-world shithole as easily as not. If that was wrong — if the secessionists kept up the fight longer than anyone expected — he could wind up shooting at cousins. Was that what Flo was worried about? He and Flo rarely — make that 'never' — talked politics, so Bob couldn't even say with confidence where his wife stood on the issues of the day. *This might be a good time to remedy that,* he considered.

"What, exactly, are you objecting to, Flo?" he asked as a conversational gambit. "You know, everyone says a tour in the Army does wonders for building character in young people."

"Bobby doesn't need any more character. He's got plenty," Flo snapped, "and he doesn't need to risk his neck over something as stupid as a bunch of cowboys deciding to go their own way. What kind of assholes do we *have* running this government? Let them go! Who needs them? We'll all be better off without them."

Bob nodded. Okay, she doesn't support civil war — fair enough. Bob, himself, wasn't too enthused over the idea of fighting a home-front war when there were plenty of foreign conflicts occupying the attention of the armed forces: Serbia, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Estonia, Yemen — were there others? There must be, but he wasn't sure which countries had occupation forces. Most of them were pretty quiet these days. That was a good thing. Quiet occupations rarely developed casualty reports.

"Hey, he might just wind up in someplace quiet, like Estonia," Bob tried to calm her.

Flo turned and grabbed a handful of newspapers from the wicker basket next to the couch. Her eyes flicked over them as she quickly discarded one after another until she found it. She tossed it to Bob who snatched it out of the air.

"Read it," she ordered.

Bob unfolded the paper and his eyes scanned the text. It was a matter of a second or two before he read: "Two Marines dead in Talinn car bomb".

"Yeah... so what? Talinn is in Yemen."

"No, doofus. Talinn is the capital of Estonia. And you want to send your son there? Are you stupid?"

"You mean the Estonians have an insurgency?" Bob was flabbergasted, and the expression on his face expressed it perfectly.

"Call it an insurgency if you want, but if there were Italian U.N. troops patrolling the streets of Erie, Pennsylvania, your neighbors would be making bombs in their basements. And so would I," she finished.

"And, furthermore, the ones I'd be trying to kill would be kids just like Bobby. No, I don't want him in the Army. I don't want him in the Marines. I don't want him in the Navy. I want him to finish school, get a job, get married, and raise a family. I don't want a folded flag to remember him by, and I don't want to be a Gold Star Mother. Fuck the Army, and I mean that sincerely."

Bob's mouth hung open, and Bobby was trying hard to suppress a snicker. Neither of them had ever heard Flo utter the 'F'-word. It was clear that this conversation had struck a nerve. It was time to retreat, retrench, and regroup. Bob turned to Bobby:

"Son, I'm afraid that's the last word on the subject. Sorry."

Bobby looked disappointed. He turned toward his mother to make one last appeal.

"This is important, Mom," he pleaded. "We're trying to keep the country united. That's what it's supposed to be. That's why it's called 'The United States'. If we let a few malcontents rip us apart, what will we call the country then? 'The Kind-Of United States'? We'll be the laughingstock of the world! We've got our own troops all over the world trying to maintain order, and we can't even control our own people! Mom, we can't let these rebels get away with this! We just can't!"

Flo had a look of intense sorrow on her face as she gazed lovingly at her one-and-only child. "Tomorrow, I'm getting you out of that school. You're not going back to a place that is methodically robbing you — and us —," she looked at her husband, "— of our own country." Bobby looked bewildered. *What in the world was she talking about?*

"Bobby, have you ever read the Declaration of Independence?", she asked. Bobby shook his head side-to-side. *No.*

"And I suppose you've never read the Constitution, either."

"That's boring stuff, Mom. It's over two hundred years old and full of 'thee's and 'thou's and other stuff that doesn't mean anything in the 21st century."

"And that's why you're not going back to that school. I'll homeschool you if necessary. You don't even know why the Revolution was fought, do you?" He shook his head again. *No.* "Well let me tell you why, right now." Bob had never seen her like this before. Whatever had lit her fuse, it was too late to snuff it now.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights... That to preserve these rights, governments are instituted

among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.'

"So," his mother turned and glared at him, "what is the purpose of government?"

Bobby was startled. He didn't think he was going to be quizzed, and so he hadn't really been listening to the words of old, dead, white men. "Uh... read it again?"

"That to preserve these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." she repeated.

"To preserve these rights —?", Bobby parroted uncertainly.

"Yes, Bobby, governments (at least ours) are created to preserve the rights of the people. Do you think 'controlling the people' has a lot to do with 'preserving the rights of the people'? I don't think they are connected at all. Your so-called 'schooling' has taught you to read but not to understand. It has taught you to calculate, but not to 'figure out'. It has taught you to write, but with a head full of fluff, all you can write is nonsense. I wish I had seen this ten years ago. Bobby, I am so sorry I have failed you. I hope, when you finally figure it out, that you will forgive me. You want to join the Army to fight for a lie, the lie that the government is everything and the people are nothing. I'm not going to let you do that. It's time you faced the truth, and it's time for your parents to face it with you."

"I don't know what you mean, Mom," Bobby said quietly.

"Neither do I," her husband added.

"When I figure it out, I'll let you know."

13 - The Enemy Within

Nebraska, north of Julesburg CO

With the sun completely gone and full darkness upon them, the quarter moon gave plenty of light in a cloudless sky. The railroad tracks connecting Barton and Julesburg crossed the state line heading southwest just a few yards ahead of the small band of raiders and in barely more than a mile entered Julesburg's town limits. Nothing except farmland bordered it for the entire distance, and since the outbreak of hostilities, no trains used these tracks. There could be no more perfect approach except one entirely underground. Their leader looked back over his shoulder and waved them forward. The men tried to walk on the wooden ties to minimize noise, but every once in a while a boot would crunch on the gravel between. No matter. Since time immemorial, sundown had marked the end of the workday for farmers. There was no one here to be disturbed by the little noise they made. Traffic on US 138 running alongside the tracks was never heavy, but tonight the road was almost empty. Only the owls in the occasional tree marked their passage.

A quarter-hour found them on the outskirts of Julesburg, and as they continued walking along the tracks smaller groups broke off and took positions at the ends of the NW-SE-oriented streets, one at Ash Street, one at Oak Street, and one at Elm. When South Cedar Street appeared on their right, the main body halted. This was as far as they needed to go.

The leader spoke into his hand-held radio: "Count off."

One by one, the other patrols reported in: "Ash ready." "Oak ready." "Elm ready."

"Cedar ready." he declared. "All units, go."

As one, each patrol crossed the tracks and the ditch separating them from US 138, and rushed across the highway and into the town. Any pedestrians on the street were shot on sight. At the corner of Cedar and 2nd, part of the Cedar patrol paused to throw incendiary grenades into the town hall building while the bulk of it continued on up Cedar Street to 3rd. There they attacked the Fire Department, killing most of the firemen on duty and disabling all of the trucks and equipment. Then they set that building ablaze. By that time, the other part of the patrol had caught up to them, and they continued in full force northwest toward the other side of town.

The initial gunshots of patrols firing on pedestrians were followed by explosions of incendiary grenades. The frame construction typical of Julesburg meant that vast areas of town were soon on fire. With no fire department to react — not that they *could* have reacted effectively to dozens of simultaneous fires — the town was doomed. Because the roving patrol would shoot dead anyone trying to escape the flames, many residents were forced to choose between death by fire or death by bullet. Several, however, made their last moments count by alerting their fellow members of the Julesburg Militia.

As the patrols zig-zagged their way northwest then northeast toward the intersection of 10th and Oak (whence they could make a dash back across the State Line into Nebraska), they were met by militia heading northeast to intercept them. At 7th and Cedar, militia engaged the Cedar patrol and cut it into two groups. The larger portion of the Cedar patrol had already passed the intersection headed for 8th Street. They were met by an intercepting unit at 8th Street. Although the patrol had M-16s and M-4s, they were up against boys and men whose experience was 'varmint hunting'. Varmint hunters learn to hit very small targets at very long distances, and to do so with a single shot. Before two minutes had passed, that fragment of the Cedar patrol had been wiped out.

The militia commander, correctly guessing that the raiders were headed for Road 41, sent four of his most dangerous snipers up Cedar to 10th Street, where they could either run up 10th to Oak or go overland to cut off an advance up Road 41. He dialed the Buckleys, relative newcomers who occupied the one and only house on North Oak Street, to warn them that both raiders and militiamen were converging on their position. Bob and Clare Buckley and their two children, Bob Jr., 15, and Laura, 13, were all militiamen, and they knew what to do.

Laura took an AR-15 from her mother's hands, cleared it and slammed a full magazine into its bottom. A belt with eight more magazines she slung over her shoulders. She snapped her white militia bandanna to shake out the folds and fastened it around her neck.

Bob Jr. preferred his 12 gauge shotgun loaded alternately with slugs and double-ought shot. A pouch of slugs on his right and a pouch of double-ought on his left rounded out his equipment.

Clare took her Winchester Model 70 Featherweight from the gun rack, kissed her husband good-bye and headed for her post on the second floor. Her night-vision equipment and years of practice clearing pests for the farmers near her hometown in Texas meant somebody was going to have a very bad night. From her south-facing windows she had a clear shot 100 yards — too easy — to the corner of

10th and Oak. No one was coming past that point without her permission.

Bob and the kids went to their prepared positions in the side yard where they sheltered behind cars and sheds. They waited.

The sniper patrol leader felt his cell phone vibrate in his shirt pocket. He flipped it open to talk to his platoon leader. "The Buckleys are on alert," Matt Claussen warned him. "Make sure they know who you are and where you are before you get near their house. You know Clare."

"Thanks, Matt," he confirmed. "Yeah, I know Clare... taught half of us how to be snipers. We'll be careful." Then he disconnected and called Bob Jr., the only one of the Buckleys for whom he had a phone number. Bob Jr. answered at once.

"Bob, it's Petey," he told him. "Tell your Mom we're in the field about 800 feet southwest of your house heading for your position. And make sure she knows we're the good guys."

Bob Jr. called up to his mother's position at a second-floor window: "Mom, Petey just called me to tell me he and his squad are coming in from the southwest."

Clare called back: "Across the fields?" Bob Jr. confirmed that they were in the fields. Clare swung her rifle around to the southwest and began scanning the area through the telescopic sight. She counted the white scarves that the Julesburg Militia wore around their necks to identify themselves to each other. "OK, I see four of them." She returned to scanning the intersection of 10th and Oak. As she listened, the sound of gunfire got louder and closer. She started praying that she and her family would survive the night.

Reflections of muzzle flashes began to light up the corner of 10th and Oak like sporadic lightning, and Clare hunkered down, her rifle resting on a folded pillow from the bed. Three figures backed into the dim light cast by the street lights. It was too bright to use the night vision equipment but still plenty bright enough without it to see that none of the three were wearing white neckerchiefs. She took aim at one of them and put her first .22-250 through the target's right lung, dead-center on her aim-point. He staggered, dropped his rifle and fell, holding his chest. His companions gave him only the briefest of glances before returning to their primary task: holding off their pursuers. Clare fired again, and a second figure flinched as the tiny bullet perforated his lung. The third man suddenly realized that they were being fired on from behind and he turned, trying to see where the shots might be coming from. Clare's third round went clean through his heart, and he collapsed in a heap.

With the immediate threat cleared, Clare lifted her head from the scope and gazed out into the distance east and northeast of the

intersection. She thought she could see some movement in the darkness. She switched on the night-vision scope and swung the rifle around to get a better view.

She counted eight or nine white bandannas coming in from the east pushing a cluster of twenty or thirty raiders who seemed to be trying an end run past the east end of town. At this point, she was sighting right down the edge of the house. She couldn't get a decent shot from here. She shouted down to her family in the side yard: "Bob, I'm moving to the other side of the house. Shout if you need me to come back."

"OK, honey," Bob answered, "Be careful."

Clare hefted her rifle and picked up the pillow and carried them both to the northeast-facing bedroom on the second floor. From there she had a clear view to the east where her fellow militiamen were herding a band of raiders. But they seemed to be pushing them north. That was no good. She flipped her cell phone open and found Matt Claussen's number. She pushed the 'TALK' button and Matt's phone rang.

"Claussen," he answered curtly.

"Matt, it's Clare Buckley. There's a group east or southeast of me that's engaged a group of raiders. Do you know who's in charge there?"

Matt inventoried his troops in his mind quickly and suggested: "It might be Dave Kovacs or Marty McConnell. I'm not sure who's that far east."

"Well, see if you can find out and get them to herd those raiders west toward me," Clare encouraged. "It's a perfect crossfire."

"OK, Clare, I'll see what I can do," Matt assured her.

Clare returned to her windowsill and tried to reacquire her targets. Some of them were now within 300 meters and well within her 'sphere of influence' even without the militia herding them closer. She started acquiring targets and picking them off. One. Two. Three. Four. The glass in the window above her head shattered and fell on her. She realized what had happened and dropped to the floor a fraction of a second before a rattle of automatic fire raked the house. She was rising from her prone position when one last round came popping through the inside wall in a little cloud of insulation and nicked the side of her skull, knocking her unconscious.

By the time she came-to, the shooting had largely stopped, and the smell of burning wood was everywhere. Matt Clausen had managed to get the group herding the raiders to turn them west toward the Buckley house, unaware that Clare was out of action. The Buckylys and the four-man sniper detachment had managed to cause so much chaos between the house and the intersection that the raiders

had taken cover and stopped moving. When the second group of raiders driven in from the east arrived, the snipers swung around to the north side of the Buckley house and picked them off as they blundered toward Road 41. When the raiders were down to four left, the leader of their patrol took five steps backward and shot dead the other three, then put the muzzle of his M-4 under his chin and blew off the top of his own head. The last detachment of raiders pinned at the corner of 10th and Oak, hearing the fighting subside, and realizing that they were not going home to Nebraska, took their own lives rather than be captured. Given the mood of the Julesburg Militia, it was arguably the easy way out of their predicament.

Six of every ten houses in Julesburg were ashes in the morning. Had any of the raiders been captured alive, their punishment would have been unspeakable. As it was, the news of the raid was sent north in the most horrible manner possible. The genitals of the raiders were cut off and collected in a large bucket. Then an old railroad handcar was rigged with a makeshift sail. When the wind was right, the hand car with its cargo was sent back along the tracks the way the raiders had come that night. Painted on the white bedsheet/sail was the message: "Figure it out from the DNA." The bodies themselves became fertilizer for the fields around Julesburg.

Other than the unarmed civilians shot by the raiders and those who chose death by fire in their homes, none of the Julesburg Militia had more than superficial wounds.

Near Guffey, TX

By the pale light of a quarter moon, two SUVs towing trailers turned off Texas route 73 west of Guffey into a barely-marked parking area. Decades ago local fishermen would put their boats into the water here for a day of recreation, but the fish had long ago left this branch — died off, most likely, from the horrendous pollution that was plainly evident to the eyes in the daylight and to the nose at all times. The drivers backed their rigs down to the water's edge, and two others guided the boats off the trailers and into the water. Then the drivers parked the rigs and joined their companions. Gear from locked boxes on the trailers was soon loaded into the boats, and the four black-clad men set off on their journey. Their trolling motors made an almost imperceptible sound. As they traveled, they each painted their faces and hands with dark, non-reflective camouflage paste.

By following the main channel they came, in a little under 7 miles, to their destination. From the bank, they could see, just to the east, the massive oil storage tanks of West Port Arthur. From here,

only a narrow strip of land, a narrower strip of water, and a single fence stood between them and their objective. A road crossed that strip of water not far away. They pulled the rubber boats up onto the shore and made them fast with ropes, then hoisted their equipment to their shoulders and set off overland.

At the fence, a bolt-cutter quickly opened a slot through which the four were able to squeeze. It was the work of merely a minute. They each made a mental note of the location of the cut through which they would make their escape. Some of them might not come back from this trip, so everyone had to be prepared to escape alone.

They saw no one except a single night watchman on his rounds, and they did not disturb him lest his failure to complete rounds might be noticed and cause an alarm. After he passed, they continued toward the oil storage tanks silently, flitting from cover to cover, each time getting closer until at last they were walking among the giant cylinders.

The tanks were painted white or some other light color because it minimized heat absorption in the blazing Texas sun. The packages they carried with them were likewise painted white in hopes they would be less visible to a casual observer. They moved as quickly as they could to the southern end of the tank farm and began working their way back north from there. To every other tank they attached two of the packages, placing them on roughly opposite sides of the structures. All of the devices were set to go off at exactly the same time, a few minutes after four in the morning. By then, they hoped, they would all be far away.

At the northern end of the tank farm, the last devices were placed on the last tank, and as silently as they had come they all departed, through the fence and down the road to where their boats were tied. They undid the ropes, pushed the craft into the water, and retraced their path back to the route 73 boat launch ramp. By the time they had come the almost-seven-miles to their starting point, everyone had cleaned their faces and hands of the dark goop that had helped them remain undetected. The boats were loaded back onto their trailers, and the two SUVs swung onto route 73 headed back to I-10 and safety. At 4:06 AM, muffled thumps from the east brought two of them to their bedroom windows to observe the fiery orange glow in the sky above West Port Arthur.

Lexington Avenue, New York City

Fred Carter merely glanced at the other man approaching the revolving security gate where he had spent the past seven-and-a-

quarter hours. The uniform said "MECO Elevator Repair", and the workman carried an oversized toolbox. There was no way that box was going to go through the revolving gate. The elevator repairman showed Fred his ID badge and a copy of the work order. Fred pushed the button to open the ADA entrance, and the repairman pushed through with his toolbox. The repairman signed the visitor's log and received a temporary visitor's badge for the building.

In the elevator lobby, the repairman put a sign on the #3 elevator door: "Elevator temporarily out of service", and compounded it by setting up three pylons in front of it from which he ran yellow "Caution" tape. A moment later the elevator door opened, two people got out and gingerly stepped over the yellow tape. The repairman stepped inside the elevator and, using his key, closed the doors and took the elevator off-grid.

Inside, with the elevator to himself, the repairman unscrewed the control panel and carefully selected seven wires. An electronic device from his toolbox was quickly spliced into the seven wires and fastened to the inside of the control panel. A fat bundle of wires emanated from a port on the device and ended in twelve small metal studs. The repairman tapped a few keys on a small keyboard attached to the device and observed the LCD display. Satisfied, he detached the keyboard and returned it to his toolbox, then lifted the top shelf from the toolbox and drew out the 12 blocks of plastic explosive hidden underneath. Each block had an adhesive strip on one side and a small container filled with hardware — nails, washers and screws — pre-fastened at the end. One by one, he stripped the protective covering from the adhesive and attached each to the side wall at the door-opening. He plugged one of the twelve small metal studs into the back of each block, then taped the wires above the door so they wouldn't dangle.

Forcing the doors apart just an inch or so, the repairman could observe the elevator lobby for activity. When the last cluster of passengers boarded one of the other elevators and rose to their destination floors, leaving the elevator lobby temporarily empty, he turned off the interior lights, pulled his key, opened the doors by hand, exited the elevator, and closed the doors by hand.

With his toolbox, he returned to the security desk and handed in his temporary badge.

"I should have known not to start something like this so late in the day," he told the security guard. "It's a bigger job than I expected. I'll be back in the morning."

"Okay, then," the security guard responded and buzzed him back out through the handicapped accessible door. The repairman

waved and strolled back to his truck, twisted the key in the ignition and drove away.

At 4:44 PM, one minute before everyone in the IRS office on the 12th floor would leap from their desks and rush toward the elevators, a circuit in elevator #3 woke up. Unbidden, the elevator went straight to the 12th floor, the doors opened, and 12 kilos of C-4 exploded sending shrapnel over the entire floor, killing 78 IRS employees and three civilians who were still trying to complete paperwork.

The massive explosion blew all the windows on the 12th floor out and rained glass shards on the streets below, killing an additional 61 pedestrians.

The building itself was so badly damaged that the steel skeleton from the 10th floor to the roof began to twist and threatened to collapse the entire structure. Fires broke out throughout the building, and the damaged sprinkler system did nothing to prevent their spread. Fearing the worst, the police cleared the entire city block around the building, and the Transit Authority shut down the tracks below ground in the vicinity of the building. At 5:22 PM, the entire building toppled onto New York City's Lexington Avenue collapsing the street above the subway and shutting down the Lexington Avenue line for the foreseeable future.

Washington, D.C.

The speaker's gavel rapped continuously until the hall came to order. When relative quiet had at last returned, she instructed the clerk to call the roll.

"Alabama!" he called, and the speaker behind him responded: "Alabama, having deliberately absented itself from this body, is no longer counted for quorum. The clerk will strike them from the roll."

The Speaker responded identically for each of the other twelve states as their names were called, ending with Wyoming. At that point, the clerk announced to the House: "Thirty-seven states are present and constitute a quorum."

The one and only item on the day's agenda was a proposal to repeal the 2nd amendment to the Constitution. There were 'nay' votes in ones and twos from hold-outs, but the final vote was 298-63 for repeal, 27 states concurring.

The Senate had likewise stripped the 13 breakaway states of their seats and passed the identical bill 58-16, 26 states concurring. A waiting conference committee declared the bills identical and sent the

text to the Secretary of State for transmittal to the Secretaries of the thirty-seven remaining states.

Within a week, twenty-eight state legislatures had approved "Repeal the Second" and notified the Secretary of State of their action. The Secretary then certified the repeal because 75 percent of the 37 states had approved it.

Whereas polls had consistently shown broad popular support for the right to bear arms, when it came down to an actual *vote* in the legislatures, it was the anti-gun congressmen who carried the day, and there were more anti-gun congressmen than there were pro-gun congressmen, at least in the thirty-seven states whose opinions counted. The day after the votes were tallied, people from all parts of the country were stunned to discover that it did, in fact, matter who the electorate sent to their state capitols. The public outcry that followed was too little, too late. "The people have spoken," the Governor of Pennsylvania opined. "At least—the people who wished to speak have spoken. Those who did not wish to speak also got their wish. What are they complaining about?"

The day after the Secretary of State had certified the repeal of the second amendment, the senior Senator from New Jersey introduced "The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act", a bill to prohibit the possession of firearms, ammunition, or other explosives by anyone not presently in service to the Federal Government, or to a State, County, or Municipal government and whose duties required them to be armed. The bill established a 120-day period during which all firearms were to be surrendered to the local police.

The Governor of Alaska called the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Public Safety and ordered him to deputize and enroll into the Alaska State Troopers' Auxiliary any law-abiding citizen who applied, thus placing them in the position of being "in service to the State of Alaska". The thought of how many Alaskans would die just from bear attacks alone without an adequate means of defense sent a shudder down his back.

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Francisco Fajardo, topped off with a full load of Venezuelan crude oil, steamed northwest accompanied by two Venezuelan destroyers, *Almirante Brión* and *Almirante García*. Having cleared the passage between Cancun and Cuba, she was just about half-way to Houston. This was the dangerous part, the waters where the U.S. Navy had already seized one tanker bound for Texas' Gulf coast refineries. The *yanquis* had already made it known that they considered the Gulf to be their private hunting preserve. Perhaps the

presence of two Venezuelan frigates would deter them from trying it again.

Ninety minutes after transiting the passage, the trio of ships was joined by a Mexican Navy destroyer, *Manuel Azeta*. The three warships took positions in a line to the northeast of *Francisco Fajardo* forming a shield of sorts against whatever might arrive from that quarter. As dawn broke over the Gulf of Mexico, a reconnaissance aircraft bearing U.S. Navy markings passed to the south, then looped around to the north and returned the way it had come. *Manuel Azeta's* captain radioed a report of the incursion of U.S. aircraft into Mexican airspace. Beyond doubt, the Mexican Navy was now talking directly to the Pentagon, registering their protest, as if that might do any good, and ambassadors were talking to ambassadors. At the insistence of *Manuel Azeta*, *Francisco Fajardo* turned west to move closer to the Mexican coastline. Its escort followed.

Within minutes, however, all four vessels began to hear returns from the east-northeast on their radar. Four or more vessels were closing on them at high speed — 30 knots or better. Without a doubt, they were U.S. Navy — probably destroyers. *Manuel Azeta* reported this to its base. The base reported it to the Secretary of the Navy. The Secretary called Governor Shipwell in Austin. Governor Shipwell called Brigadier Harlan Carter. Two B1-Bs took off from Kelly AFB and a third began taking on fuel from a tanker west of Corpus Christi while it waited for the other two to catch up.

"Peacemaker-one, how do you read?" Major Cohen inquired as he approached the vicinity of Corpus Christi. Colonel Edmund Fannin heard his call-sign and responded: "Peacemaker-one reads you five-by-five."

"Peacemaker-two and Peacemaker-three ready to join up," Cohen informed him, "Cohen, Stutz and company incorporated, at your service."

"Give me a few minutes to top-off, and I'll be right there," Fannin informed them. Shortly, two B1-Bs appeared, one on either side of Fannin's craft, and they waited for Fannin to finish taking on fuel. In a moment, the tanker began to reel its fuel line back in, and Fannin eased away from the tanker. Clear of obstructions, the three throttled up and went to full afterburner headed southeast.

In forty minutes, they were over the Gulf east of Tampico on a course for Merida. Fannin keyed his microphone: "*Manuel Azeta*, *Manuel Azeta*, this is Peacemaker-one, over."

"Welcome to Mexico, Colonel Fannin," *Manuel Azeta's* captain greeted him. "We are pleased to have your company."

"*Azeta*, what is your condition?", Fannin asked.

"There are four vessels, probably U.S. Navy, in pursuit. They have closed to nineteen nautical miles and are now within Mexican territorial waters."

"Understood," Fannin confirmed. "Unidentified U.S. Navy vessels, this is Colonel Edmund Fannin of the Texas Air Force. You are in Mexican territorial waters threatening peaceful shipping. You are ordered to reverse course and depart the area immediately. You have one minute to comply. Confirm."

Aboard the lead destroyer, the radioman looked up from his instruments and informed the Officer of the Deck: "Colonel Fannin of the Texas Air Force orders us to confirm we have reversed course." Radar had already identified the newcomers and was tracking them.

"Do we have a firing solution?" the OD asked the fire-control desk.

"Yes, sir, we can fire any time, at the aircraft or the ships or both," fire-control confirmed.

"Colonel Fannin," the lead destroyer's commanding officer warned, "if you fire on us, we will open fire on the tanker and its escort. Break off your attack or suffer the consequences."

Fannin smirked. "The consequences are that property values in Chicago, Washington, and New York will plummet. Nuclear weapons can do that. You have twenty seconds to comply and confirm. Fannin out."

The destroyer's captain watched the wall clock's second hand sweep through ten more seconds before he keyed the microphone: "Reversing course," was all he said. As if in slow motion, the four destroyers slowed and began to turn away.

Francisco Fajardo and its escorts turned back to their original course.

14 - Truth or Consequences

Salt Fork State Park near Kimbolton, OH

The rusty old Ford pick-up jounced southward along R-55 toward Devil's Knob. The road ran mostly along the ridgeline through thick forest, and there was very little traffic today, a Tuesday. It was terrain that Tom Allen and his two sons knew well although they had never hunted in this particular section. Given what had just happened, he thought they might never hunt here again.

Up ahead, R-57 branched off to the left. Tom slowed the truck and swung around to the northbound side of the road. The three got out and gathered at the back of the truck. Each had a GPS device. They compared locations and agreed that all the devices were comparably accurate. From the bed of the truck, they each hauled their gun cases and camping equipment and set out east across a wide meadow. Together they plunged into the forest on the other side and followed wherever there seemed to be an easy path. When Tom estimated they were 100 yards into the deep woods, he stopped, looked around, and chose a spot. It was high and dry with plenty of pine needles on the ground. He and the boys pulled the overgrowth away to reveal the soil beneath, then they each brought out large plastic tarps and laid them on the ground off to the side. They began to dig.

When they had a pit two feet wide, three feet deep, and five feet long, they stopped. From their camping gear, they drew several large plastic bags. Into the bags they carefully slid their prized hunting rifles along with telescopic sights, boxes of ammunition, cleaning kits, cans of gunpowder, bags of silica-gel, and reloading equipment. When a bag was loaded, one of them would tape the mouth of the bag shut, fold it over, and tape it again. It wasn't perfect, but it would have to do.

Each finished bag was carefully lowered into the pit and stacked at the center. When the last bag was placed on top of the pile, one last tarp was laid across the lot and pushed down along the sides to form a cap over the whole. Then the dirt that had come out of the pit originally was shoveled back in, burying their treasure. The dirt that would no longer fit because the pit was now filled with guns was dragged away and dumped, they hoped, inconspicuously. Pine

needles and overgrowth were then spread over the disturbed dirt to hide the fact that someone had been digging here.

Last, each of them recorded on their GPS the location where they all stood. One day, hopefully soon, they would return here and reclaim what was theirs. They each encrypted the coordinates of the spot with their own personal security keys. If any of the GPS' were to fall into the wrong hands, they would give away no secrets.

Their business here now finished, they turned and walked back out of the woods toward their truck, their camping gear over their shoulders. Only by the most miraculous of coincidences would anyone ever discover what they had hidden. When the authorities came to collect their guns, there would not be any left to collect.

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Jake Mack's telephone rang. He picked it up on the first ring. "Yeah?" he answered.

"Jake? It's Mort. I just got a call from Sue and Larry. They said they saw a buncha' guys taking guns out of Chris' house. Looks like they're starting the round-up. Get ready."

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be, Mort. I haven't had them unloaded since I cleaned them last. Good luck, buddy. Call me when you have more information."

"OK," Mort assured him, "I will."

Jake immediately dialed the next number down his chain. There was no answer. He dialed the alternate. It was picked up on the first ring. "Hello?"

Jake recounted what he had heard from Mort Spall. "Thanks," he was told, "I'll pass the word." When Jake was finished with his list, he called back the number that hadn't answered. There was still no answer, so he tucked his .45-caliber Colt model 1911 into the holster in the small of his back, tossed a jacket on to hide the fact that he was carrying, and headed for his car. A few minutes later, he rolled past the address of the phone that hadn't answered. Two cars and a truck with official markings were parked at the curb, and black-clad men were standing around the front lawn. There were obvious bullet-holes in the building itself. Jake didn't even slow down. He did, however, call the first down-chain number he had. Again, it was picked up on the first ring. "Hello?"

"It's Jake. Tess Campbell's place has just been raided. Shots fired. That's all I know. Spread the word up, down, and sideways." He headed back to his own house.

He parked his car in its numbered space and walked toward his condo. A voice called to him: "Mr. Mack?" He ignored it. The voice called again: "Mr. Mack?" He continued walking.

Finally, the voice became authoritative: "Halt. Mr. Mack, stop where you are." Jake turned back to his left as his right hand swept inside his jacket and gripped the handle of his .45, thumbing the safety off. As he turned, he could see two deputy sheriffs approaching him. When they realized his right hand was inside his jacket, both of them reached for the SIG pistols each carried. Jake drew and fired on the nearest deputy, striking her once in the chest, then immediately pointed at the other deputy, who had not quite cleared his holster. Both froze in the positions they had when they first made eye-contact.

"Take your hand off the gun," Jake ordered him.

"Jake Mack," the deputy informed him, "you just killed a law enforcement officer. You're going to the gas chamber. Put your weapon down. You're under arrest."

"You know what they say," Jake explained, "the first one's expensive. All the rest are free." The deputy cleared the gun out of its holster. Jake fired twice more at the deputy's chest and finished up with one more to his head. The first deputy's eyes were wide. She had fallen from the first shot and was using both hands to clutch her chest in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding. Jake took four steps toward her, pointed the .45 at her head and fired. Then he unbuckled both gunbelts from the fallen deputies and entered his apartment in possession of two additional fully loaded handguns.

He dialed Mort Spall. "It's started," he told Mort. "I just had to shoot two deputies. They're coming — they're here."

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"I'm Sally Mayhew. This is NewsChannel 5. It's 6 o'clock. And now for the latest breaking news, we go to Curtis Sampson on location. Curtis, what do you have for us?"

The camera zoomed in on Curtis Sampson as he began speaking. "Sally, we have had reports of six National Guard units or Sheriffs being fired on by citizens so far today, the first day of the round-up of guns that haven't been turned in under the provisions of The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act passed earlier this year in the wake of the repeal of the Second Amendment.

"As you know, many firearms were voluntarily surrendered by law-abiding citizens over the past several months, but the 120-day amnesty ran out earlier this week, and National Guardsmen are being pressed into service to help the police and sheriffs round up the remaining firearms still in civilian hands. It appears that some citizens

have decided they aren't going to give up their guns without a fight. Some of our news teams were out with units that were fired on. We have tape showing some of the incidents, but my understanding is that our editors have decided it's not suitable for broadcast. So far, four deputies have been killed and two others injured, along with one Guardsman. That Guardsman was a casualty when a Molotov cocktail hit an Armored Personnel Carrier with him inside. The person who threw the gasoline bomb was shot by other National Guard troops, and so far all the people who have fired on Guard troops or deputies have been killed or captured.

"Sunrise County Sheriff Bill Andrews told me a short while ago that his department is going to have to shut down operations as darkness approaches. With this much resistance coming from the populace, night operations would be extremely hazardous to his deputies. Back to you, Sally."

"Curtis," Sally Mayhew prompted, "how do the deputies know which firearms are still out there? Did the Sheriff say?"

"Sally," Curtis Sampson responded, "when The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act was passed last March, it became illegal to sell firearms to the public and many gun stores went out of business. When a Federal Firearms License, an 'FFL', is surrendered, as when a store closes up shop, the store's records, copies of the Federal Form 4473, are turned over to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the BATFE. While previously the BATFE was required by law to destroy their copies of the 4473's, they were never required to destroy 4473's that came into their possession as a result of a FFL being revoked or surrendered. So, with the closing of the last retail gun store, BATFE now has, effectively, all the 4473's that have ever been filed in the state. They know which ones have been turned in. All the others are, presumably, still out there.

"About two weeks ago, according to Sheriff Andrews, local courts began issuing search warrants based on the list of firearms still unaccounted for, and it is these search warrants the Guard and the Sheriffs are executing today." He paused expectantly, and Sally picked up on it.

"Did the Sheriff give you any idea how many firearms are still missing?"

"No, Sally, he said he didn't have an accurate count, but expected it to be anywhere between 4,000 and 10,000 in this county alone."

Sally Mayhew had an odd expression on her face, and any observant viewer would have clearly seen it. "Wow, Curtis," she mused, "that's a lot of missing guns." Curtis nodded ominously.

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The knock on the door was not entirely unexpected. Tom Allen's oldest son opened the door to find two deputies in their SWAT uniforms with three more at the curb. "Mr. Thomas Allen?" the lead deputy inquired.

"Junior or senior?" the boy asked.

"Senior, I guess," the deputy responded.

"That's my dad. I'll get him."

"Who are you?" the deputy asked.

"I'm Thomas Allen Jr.," the boy answered.

The deputy handed him a folded paper. "Then this is for you," he told him. "It's a search warrant. It authorizes us to search these premises for firearms and other contraband. Step aside."

The boy stepped aside to let the deputies enter just as his father arrived from the back of the house. "What's the matter, officer?" Tom Allen asked.

"Search warrants," was all the deputy said. "Mr. Thomas Allen Sr., I presume?" Tom Allen nodded. The deputy handed him his warrant.

"Mr. Allen, our records show that you and other members of this household possess nine long guns and two handguns. Under the provisions of The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act passed this year you were to have turned these firearms in as of last week. If you hand them over right now, it will only result in a misdemeanor charge and a small fine for you and the others. If you make us look for them, it could mean felony charges and jail time for all concerned. Why don't you do yourself a favor and bring them out right now."

Tom and the boys had spent months rehearsing what they were going to say. Their stories would all mesh perfectly, of that they had no doubt.

"Officer, we don't own any of those guns anymore. Several years ago, we all decided that hunting was not something we cared to do as a family anymore. These days we mostly go fishing. The rifles and handguns were sold, most at local gun shows, others through the classified ads. You can look, but it's going to be a big waste of time."

"Mr. Allen, it's going to go down very hard on you if we find anything," the deputy warned him with an air of finality. "Are you sure you want us to execute these warrants?"

Tom Sr. shrugged and looked at his eldest. "There's nothing we can bring out, deputy. If we had known this was going to happen, we would have gotten receipts, but we can't even show you paperwork to prove the guns aren't here anymore. I guess if you don't believe

us, you'll just have to search." He stepped aside and swung his arm in a gesture of invitation.

The deputy turned and motioned for the rest of the team to come forward. Three more deputies came up the front walk carrying various pieces of equipment. Tom didn't care for the fact that the equipment included crowbars.

Inside, the deputies broke into two groups and split up. Starting in the basement they used what appeared to be a metal detector to scan the walls and ceiling. The walls here were unfinished beyond the occasional piece of plywood, and the ceilings were little more than bats of fiberglass insulation. When the device beeped the other deputy would probe the insulation with the crowbar or pry the plywood away from the supporting two-by-fours to peer behind.

Above in the living quarters, the walls and ceilings were finished. When the metal detector beeped a deputy would sink the crowbar into the wallboard and yank a chunk of it away to expose what was underneath.

When Tom Sr. saw what they were doing he flew into a rage.

"Hey! What the hell do you think you're doing?" he demanded pointing at the destroyed wall.

The lead deputy rounded on him. "You had your chance, and you insisted we search to find your guns. Okay, so we're searching. Is there anything you'd like to tell us before we have to go through the whole house?"

"I already told you" Tom pleaded, "there aren't any guns here. Do you have to destroy the whole house to prove it?"

"That's how we do searches," the deputy screamed at his face from three inches away. "Back off, Mr. Allen, or we'll arrest you for interfering with a law enforcement officer in the performance of his duties. Or you could just bring out the guns and save the rest of the house. Your choice."

"You're going to trash this house and find nothing, and then I'll be suing you and the city for the damage you've caused." The deputy grabbed him by the wrist, spun him around, and had cuffs on him so fast, Tom wasn't even aware something bad was about to happen. Seeing his father being man-handled by the beefy deputy, Tom Jr. leaped onto the deputy's back and had his arms around the deputy's neck when the other deputy hit the Allen boy across the back of the skull with his night stick.

In the end, the deputies arrested the whole family, Tom Sr., Dorothy, Tom Jr., and Edward, before returning to their work. As they progressed through the house finding nothing, the extent of the destruction became more and more gratuitous: a grandfather clock was simply pushed over to expose the wall behind. Paintings were

ripped away from their mountings. In the attic, insulation was tossed everywhere willy-nilly and many holes were left in the upstairs ceiling where deputies had 'accidentally' stepped off the rafters while searching.

The town judge, by now completely disgusted with the number of otherwise-law-abiding citizens brought in for 'interfering', simply dismissed the charges against the Allens and sent them home. That was easier said than done. When their property was returned to them by the Sheriff's Clerk, their cell phones had mysteriously been damaged beyond use and their credit cards had had their magnetic stripes erased, rendering them unsuitable for use either at an ATM or for buying a cab ride home. When they did, finally, arrive home after a long walk, they discovered their front door left wide-open, the home telephone ripped from the wall, two laptop computers missing, and all the gasoline siphoned from the tanks of their three cars.

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"I'm not going. Do I look like I'm crazy?"

"What do you mean 'you're not going'?", the senior deputy snarled. "Get your ass out of that chair and into your patrol car. You've got warrants to serve. That's your job. Get moving."

"I didn't sign up to collect guns from my neighbors," the first deputy replied. "I especially didn't sign up to get shot at by those very same neighbors. Do you know we've had more casualties today than we had all last year? This is crazy! We don't know where the next bullet's coming from! I'm not going."

The senior deputy buzzed one of the other deputies on desk duty as a result of an accidental discharge in the locker room. "Matt, come in here."

When Matt entered, the senior deputy pointed at the other deputy and told Matt: "Take this *Barney Fife's* gun and bullet and badge. He's fired. Then give him a ride home, and while you're there, collect all his guns. Since he doesn't work for county law enforcement anymore, he's not entitled to have them."

Matt relieved his former colleague of his issue weapon and ammunition and escorted him to the parking lot where they got into a patrol car. The ride home was spent in almost total silence. Neither spoke to the other aside from a single remark, unanswered, from Matt: "This is bogus."

As they waited for a red light to turn green, a small group approached them. "Hey, Officer Matt! What's going on?" their leader called.

Matt rolled down his window to speak with them. He knew the value of good community relations. "Oh, not much except a ga-jillion search warrants to execute, and this one", he pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, "doesn't want to help because he's afraid of getting shot. How's that for law-abiding, huh? The chief just fired him 'cause he won't do the job he's paid to do."

"Bull!", the other deputy spat out. "I just think it's stupid taking guns away from law-abiding people who aren't a threat to anybody else. We should have done what Alaska did and make all these people —" he waved toward the little group, "— deputies so they can at least defend themselves."

"Yeah, Mister Philosopher, here," Matt scoffed looking over at his passenger, then realized that his passenger had a look of horror on his face. Matt turned to see a large caliber handgun pointed directly at his head.

"You must be the bad cop," the group's leader said, then pulled the trigger. He leaned in through the window and spoke to the former deputy: "That makes you the good cop. I suggest you not leave this asshole's gun where little kids might find it." He winked at the deputy and turned and walked away with his group following him.

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The entire block containing Jake Mack's apartment had been sealed off. The Sheriff called him on his cell phone to urge him to leave his guns and come out with his hands in the air. Jake knew he was not going to survive this day whether he surrendered or not — cop-killers had a very short life-span even in custody — and he had already decided that he was not going out alone. He already had two gun-confiscators to his credit so he considered himself ahead of the game. It could only get better.

In preparation for this day, he had pre-cut 3/8" Plexiglas sheets to fit all of his windows in the hope they would deflect any tear-gas rounds fired into his apartment. In case they failed, he also had two gas masks, although he had no idea whether they would actually work. He had his answer very soon.

Three loud boom's were followed by three tear gas canisters exploding in the center of the room. The Plexiglas might as well not have been there for all the protection it offered. Jake pulled a gas mask from its bag and slipped it over his head. He was able to breathe, but the smell was awful. Quickly, he unfastened the Plexiglas panels and let them fall away enabling him to return fire from the windows. Two 12-gauge shotguns were by his side, each loaded with slugs.

The Sheriff's deputies behind their cars on the street in front of his condo waited for the tear gas to take effect. They expected that the suspect would run hacking and coughing from his shelter into the waiting arms of deputies stationed outside his door, or he would blunder into the fresh air with his guns blazing and be cut down in a hail of bullets. Sometimes, the suspect would succumb to the tear gas and be unable to find his way to safety. That was almost always fatal since the gas made breathing agony and actually damaged the tissues of the lungs. Either way — no matter.

They were so focused on the windows of Jake's apartment, none of them noticed the half-dozen-or-so figures working their way down alleys and over back fences in pairs behind them. One would climb over a fence and the partner would pass their cargo over to him before climbing the fence himself. Slowly, they closed the distance to the street where scores of deputies huddled behind their cars, their AR-15s and M-16s pointed at Jake's condo. At the front door to Jake's condo, a team of eight deputies prepared to charge the dwelling. They could see wisps of gas leaking out where the door didn't close completely. Nearly the entire Sunrise County Sheriff's Department was now dedicated to bringing Jake Mack in, dead or alive — preferably dead.

At a signal from the SWAT team leader, two of the team hit Jake's door with a battering ram, and it burst inward. Jake turned and began firing his 12-gauge shotgun. The first shot was a clean miss, and Jake racked the slide to bring another round into firing position. A stream of machine-gun fire stitched his chest and his fingers instinctively tightened on the trigger as he died. His second and last shot punctured the flak vest of one of the deputies, killing him instantly. The rest of the team continued firing into the smoke-filled room until they were sure there was no return fire.

Across the street, eight of Jake's friends from the militia began firing at the deputies' backs. Four deputies fell in the first volley and the rest, panicking because they didn't know whether it was safe to give up their protected positions behind their cars, turned to face their attackers. Now the deputies were trading shots face-to-face with the attacking militia, all of whom were able to shelter behind the corners of buildings or trees. Without warning, a half-dozen beer bottles, oil-soaked rags burning in their necks, soared through the air toward the huddled deputies. When they hit the pavement, most of them shattered splashing gasoline and instantly bursting into flame.

Several of the deputies, realizing they were in untenable positions, threw down their weapons and raised their hands. The militiamen shot them anyway. The days of compromise and taking prisoners had passed, never to return.

When the SWAT team learned from their radios that the deputies outside were taking fire, they rushed from the apartment and scattered to the sides, flanking the militiamen. The deputies on the street now moved around to the other side of their cars for protection. The militiamen were unprepared for the SWAT team to attack from the flank and were quickly cut down by the H&K MP5s the SWAT team carried.

Jake Mack and the eight militiamen who came to his aid now lay dead, along with eleven deputies and the Sheriff himself. When the mayor heard the tally, twelve dead including the Sheriff and two patrol cars burned beyond recognition, he called the governor immediately.

"I need some reinforcements, and I need them tonight!" he told the governor.

The governor was very sympathetic, but ultimately unhelpful. "You're not the only town having these problems," the governor told him. "Eighty-five percent of our National Guard is deployed overseas, and half the ones who aren't won't answer a call-up. You're on your own. I know that's bad news, but it's the best news I have for you. Good luck."

15 - The Blood of Tyrants

Gloria Talamanco had a smirk of satisfaction on her face, and with good reason. Watching the news reports out of Ohio and Tennessee, among many others, made her realize that just because those states hadn't joined them in leaving the United States didn't mean that they were entirely happy with the way things had turned out, either.

And she realized something else, too. *With just a little extra help, she thought, that little prick of a president, Doug Farnham, would resign for his own safety. What, she wondered, might be the straw that breaks the son-of-a-bitch's back?* The Eastern States had been unable to swing a big-enough club in the first eight months since the breakaway, and now, with the gun owners in their own states rising up in righteous anger against their elite masters, it was almost at the point where they were paying no attention to the breakaway states at all.

Not that she was complaining, mind you. She just figured that it couldn't last forever, and Farnham or his successor would eventually get around to the business of conquering their rebellious sisters. A good offense, she knew, was the best defense. If ever the time was right, it was now. If the people shooting police and sheriffs and National Guardsmen were a little more effective, the whole structure would collapse. How to make them more effective?

Their efforts were, from the news reports she had heard and seen, little more than pin-pricks, although in some places the situation was more properly described as "mob rule", with more than just a few police and sheriff's departments rendered ineffective or just plain defunct. They waited until the police went out on a raid and reacted with guerilla attacks. What the guerillas really needed were to become pro-active. For that, they had to be able to plan ahead, and for that they needed intelligence — of the military sort. Yes — She reached for the phone.

The call to the headquarters of the Idaho State Police went straight to the Commandant's desk. "Yes, ma'am," the Commandant started off, "what can I do for you?"

"Gary, I'm curious to know what happened to the contents of the Federal Office Complex in Boise after we kicked them all out," Gloria Talamanco queried. "Did we think to save any of it?"

"Any of it?" he responded with a hint of a laugh in his voice. "We archived all of it. Why? Are you looking for something special?"

"Intelligence."

"Governor, it was a Federal building. That's the wrong place to look for intelligence." and Gary Stern started laughing.

"Gary, you never can resist, can you?" Gloria Talamanco poked at him. "Do we have anything like an inventory?"

"— of information? Well, we have eighteen or nineteen of what they call 'file servers' — kind of like mini-computers — and thousands of pounds of paper documents. I'm not sure that anyone has actually looked at all of it yet. Shall I put someone on it?"

"Absolutely. I want to know what, in terms of information, we have there that might be useful. Get someone started on inventorying the data-content and get back to me tomorrow with an estimate of how long it's going to take. Come to think of it, put several people on it."

"Done," he assured her.

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"Hey, look at this!"

The other stopped what he was doing and scooted his chair across the room. "What'cha got?" he asked.

"Personnel roster... BATFE, looks like."

"That's old news. We know all their names already and most of them are in custody anyway."

"This isn't just for the Boise office. It's a download of the whole roster: names, home addresses, the works, and it's for the whole country, over 32,000 rows."

The other programmer scooted his chair back to his own desk and picked up the phone. He dialed the number without even glancing at the keypad. "Yes," he responded when the call had been answered, "we've found something you might be interested in." There was a long pause before he continued: "I'll bring it right over."

"Print three pages as a sample," he told his companion. As he examined the sheets rolling off the printer, he assured him: "You've sure earned your salary today."

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The subject of the e-mail message from her cousin was intriguingly mysterious: *'Wait til you see this!'*. Flo clicked the link in the body of the message. The page that opened was so plain-vanilla, she at first thought it was a text file. Indeed, it was barely more than that: a simple spreadsheet with names and addresses and telephone numbers. It was the heading that caught her immediate attention:

"ATF Field Agents". She clicked the "ZIPcode" column heading to sort it and pulled the scrollbar down until she could see "Pennsylvania". There were no entries for her ZIPcode, but there were two in a nearby neighborhood. She picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hi," she started, "it's Flo. Have you seen the website with the ATF agents' addresses on it?"

"No," the other replied, "but I haven't checked my e-mail recently. Where did it come from?"

"My cousin in Bergamo, Italy sent me the link," Flo told him. "He didn't say how he came across the information. The website itself seems to be in Albania. I guess we'll be invading them next."

"Don't worry about the Albanians," he scoffed. "We don't have enough spare troops to invade Key West, much less another country. Send me the link just in case my list of contacts isn't as extensive as yours."

Flo pasted the link into the body of an email and sent it to her newest friend of a friend of a friend, all of whom were, at least on the surface, like her, ready to resist an increasingly authoritarian government.

Pennsylvania was, she felt, home to a rather more individualistic populace than, say, Illinois where she was born. Yet the number of people she had talked to in the last year or so who were perfectly comfortable with the notion of the Department of Homeland Security microchipping everyone in order to be able to track down and apprehend internal terrorists was absolutely frightening. She counted among these her husband Bob and her son, Bob Jr., not yet 15 and anxious to join the Army. As a result, she had been virtually unable to have a serious conversation with either of them on current events since the Spring. Before that she had never thought it necessary.

The few people she now counted among her inner circle were all people she had met within the past three to five months, mostly as a result of her expressing anti-government sentiments in public places. Not every time, but every now-and-then someone would approach her after an outburst and engage her in conversation. One or two of those — maybe all of them, she now considered — might have been government agents trying to infiltrate the less-compliant segments of the populace. She certainly was one of those, she realized.

The group she was now hooked to was almost entirely men. Flo was one of only four women that she knew of, mostly from having seen them at meetings, and she didn't know any of their names. It was against the rules to garner too much information about other members.

She would have preferred to have her husband, Bob, next to her when she went to the occasional meeting, but she knew better

than that. Bob was blissfully ignorant of the radical changes his own country was undergoing. He was still firmly in possession of the opinion that the government had only his best interests at heart despite Flo's attempts to make him open his eyes. *How many times, she asked herself, had she asked Bob Persky to translate 'Department of Homeland Security' into his parents' language: Russian?*

"*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Besopasnosti*", he would always reply, and never realize that the initials were 'KGB'.

Bob thought Flo had gone off the deep end. Flo was not entirely sure Bob was wrong on that score. Now she was a member of a 'cell' and this sounded to her uncomfortably like 'a Communist cell', and she wondered whether she was really doing the right thing. Certainly, to hear some of the other members speak, there might come a time when she would be asked to lay her life on the line for what she believed, and this made her uneasy. She was 90 percent sure that resisting the changes now happening in her country was the right thing to do. It was the other 10 percent that caused her all the worry.

Barely two hours after forwarding the message, Flo's phone rang and she picked it up. "Hello?" It was her contact person, calling her back.

"Flo, this is dynamite. Tell me again where you got that list?" he asked.

"I have a cousin who lives in Bergamo, Italy," she began. "'Steno' we call him. Steno just sent it to me today or last night, but he didn't say where it came from. Is it real?" Flo asked.

"We don't know, yet," her contact confided, "but it looks like it might be. We're checking it to see if what's there matches with reality. If it does, our tactics will be radically altered by it."

"How do you mean that?" Flo asked. She was almost sure she wasn't going to like the answer.

"Information — especially good information — has a tendency to alter the balance of power," he explained to Flo. "The ATF has always been a very secretive organization. You don't know who's part of the operation until they break your door down at two in the morning. Knowing who the enemy is allows us to exert pressure more efficiently." *Okay, Flo thought, that doesn't sound all that bad.*

"Hey," he continued, "there's an emergency meeting tonight. Are you going to be able to make it?"

"Depends," Flo mused. "What time?"

"Same time: 7:30," he confirmed.

"I'll try," Flo promised. "It depends on what the boys have planned for tonight."

The meeting place was within walking distance of Flo's apartment, and neither Bob nor Bob Jr. had anything planned beyond immersing themselves in the latest reality-TV show, something about people who apprentice themselves to craftsmen for 30 days and try to become artisans — whatever — virtually overnight. More pabulum for an American populace too devoid of intellect to actually notice. After dinner, she slipped out and headed for the meeting.

Only two of the other women were there, and only about half the men. It was the middle of the work week, so perhaps the others had been unable to break away. *Not a very great problem, she thought, since their main function was collecting information of various sorts and funneling it back up the line to a place or a person she didn't know and didn't want to know. In this world, ignorance truly was bliss.*

They chatted and gave reports for about 35 minutes, then the meeting started to break up. As people drifted toward the door, her contact-person approached Flo and tugged lightly on her sleeve. She turned.

"I have something I want you to do," he told her.

"Sure," she brightened, anxious for something new to do for the cause. "What?"

He handed her a small, blue pistol. Flo looked at it, then looked up at her contact, her eyes widening. "What's this for?" she asked breathlessly.

"It's for practicing with," he explained. "I want you to become familiar with it so that when you need to use it you'll know what to do. Have you ever fired a pistol before?" he asked.

She shook her head. *No.*

He handed her a slip of paper. She took it from him more as a reflex than as a thought-driven act. "That's the address of an instructor who will teach you what you need to know. Call him when you have a few hours to spare. Will you do that?"

She nodded. "Yes," she agreed.

"In the meantime, since you're going to be carrying this around, you should know the basics," he took the pistol from her hands. "This is the safety," he indicated a switch on the receiver. "When it's down, it's safe. When it's horizontal, it's ready to fire." He pushed the slide back a little to check for brass in the chamber and announced: "Other than that, this is the original *point-and-click interface.*"

"And who am I supposed to kill?" Flo asked, still not quite believing she was considering it.

"We don't know, yet. Don't worry, though. You'll be the third to know, right after I do. You just concentrate on getting good with this. Trust your instructor, pay attention, learn, and do it soon."

Flo stood at the table and gripped the little pistol with her off-hand, her right hand. She fired three shots at the paper target 10 yards distant and watched the holes appear where the bullets passed through it. It was hard to make out the holes because all three were in the black central spot. She was better, she realized, with her off-hand than she was with her left. *That might be a good thing, she thought, since pistols eject their brass to the right for the convenience of right-handed shooters.*

Over the past week she had spent almost six hours at the range firing two-handed, left-handed, right-handed, prone, lying on her side, and seated. She had settled on a small-of-the-back holster as the best compromise between 'easily concealable', 'easy to draw', and 'comfortable'. And she was growing comfortable with the idea that one day soon she would use this little pistol to take someone's life. *An assassin, she rolled the word around in her mind, that's what I'm becoming.*

"You're getting pretty good," her instructor praised her. He never used her name. In fact, he didn't know her name, and she didn't know his. He brought the target in and changed it for a fresh one, a human silhouette, then sent it back out to 5 yards. He took the pistol from her and walked away toward his reloading bench. Flo watched him walk away, wondering what he was going to do with the little .380-caliber automatic.

Suddenly, he turned and shouted "Triple!" at her as he pitched the pistol underhanded toward her. In the half-second it took for the weapon to arc toward her waiting hand, she took inventory. He hadn't put the safety on — she would have heard the 'click'. He hadn't removed the magazine and racked the slide to clear the chamber — she hadn't heard that either. Therefore, the gun was in 'condition one': there was a round in the chamber and the safety was off. She plucked the gun out of the air with two hands, careful to keep her finger from prematurely touching the trigger, turned and put three more rounds into the target, two in the chest, one in the head. The three shots came so close to one another it sounded as if it were one long 'boom'.

"I'll tell them you're ready," he told her with an unmistakably congratulatory tone.

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"His name is Roderick Palumbo, and he works for ATF. He is half of the ATF personnel in Erie — actually, he just works here — he's assigned to the Cleveland office and works remotely. He lives in Corry. Here's his address." He handed her a slip of paper.

"When?" she asked. It had been so long since the original suggestion had been made that she had begun to think everyone had changed their minds about it. The paper quivering in her hands put the lie to that thought.

"Our surveillance leads us to believe that he and his wife will go grocery shopping," her contact told her, "either Wednesday after he comes home from work or Thursday after work. They seem to always shop together, and they do it a couple of times each week, never buying very much. They probably do a large list every now and then, but we haven't seen a pattern for that as of yet."

"So, I pop him — what? — as they're pushing the cart to their car?" Flo asked.

"That would be my choice," he told her, "but it's completely up to you as to when and where. No one is allowed to second-guess the shooter."

"His wife will be with him," she pressed. "What about her?"

"You pop her, too," he explained. "You can't leave witnesses. She has to die with him."

"Their kids — they'll be orphans," Flo sounded horrified, her mother's instincts rising to the surface.

"I don't want to sound overly cruel," he told her, "but — good. ATF agents have left lots of orphans in their wakes, not to mention a fair number of dead children themselves. A couple dozen kids died in Waco at the siege of the Branch Davidian complex, all of them over about a thousand dollars in taxes. And don't forget the Cartwrights four years back. Three kids: 11, 7, and 4, suddenly rendered orphans when ATF raided the wrong address and just shot everything that moved. Within the past five months, there have been six new orphans in Pennsylvania alone thanks to ATF. You're worried about *their* kids? Why? They don't worry about anyone else's."

"Then what?" she continued. "I casually walk to my car, start up and drive away?"

"No. You casually toss the gun under any nearby car," he explained, "strip off the rubber gloves you will be wearing so as not to leave fingerprints or to pick up gunpowder residue on your hands, and by that time your driver should have your getaway car right there so you can climb in and depart the scene with great alacrity."

"And when we get caught?" she challenged him.

"You're giving the police more credit than they deserve. Police aren't hired for their intelligence. In fact, some cities disqualify applicants if they test-out with a too-high IQ." Flo snorted in disbelief.

"It's true!" he insisted. "There was even one case where a guy in — Connecticut, I think — sued the Police Department for discrimination because they said he was too smart to be a cop!"

"Tell me he lost?" Flo jabbed at him.

"Yup. He lost. The judge said the PD could use any criteria it wanted because it was entrusted with the safety of the community. You could look it up on the web."

"OK," she finished, "*if* we get caught, do you have any advice?"

"As a matter of fact, I do: shut up. Make them wonder if you're able to speak, hear, read, or write. If necessary, just say you think you ought to speak to a lawyer before discussing anything with them, even the weather. *'Nice day, isn't it, miss?'. 'Why, Officer Jones, I think I should consult with my attorney before making such value judgments,'* and then stick to it. If you say nothing, and your partner says nothing, they have *zilch*, and I guarantee your partner will say nothing. If either of you blabs, they get you both. If they offer you immunity, realize that it's all oral agreements, and you know what they say about oral agreements —"

"Yeah," Flo finished, "they're not worth the paper they're not written on."

"Bingo."

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Nan and Rod Palumbo always shopped at the Sav-A-Lot. Their prices seemed always to edge out the competition, even if just by pennies. No sense wasting money, right? Rod wondered if the savings were worth the hassle of dealing with a store that seemed always to be a little over-crowded.

Today, they had a short list. It certainly wouldn't be more than seventy dollars, Nan was sure. The half-filled basket reassured her as they headed for the check-out counter.

Flo's basket contained only snack foods: potato chips and soft drinks, mostly, with a smattering of household items. She was careful to pick up packages only by the edges, leaving minimal fingerprints or none at all. When she saw the Palumbos line up for check-out, she eased her way over to the Express Check-out line and began working her way to the register. She paid with cash and was finished while Nan and Rod were still being rung up. Loitering near the door, she called her driver on his cell phone. "Three minutes," she warned him,

then immediately disconnected. From her pocket, she pulled two rubber gloves and put them on.

Nan swiped her credit card to pay for the groceries, and together she and Rod pushed the cart out into the parking lot and toward Nan's SUV. Flo followed six yards behind. As she exited the store, she turned to her right and saw her getaway car approaching slowly. She closed the distance to Rod Palumbo, while she fished the pistol out of her purse. She clicked the safety off; she knew there was already a round in the chamber, and the little Beretta was double action for the first shot.

At a distance of four yards she called: "Hey, Rod!" Both Palumbos stopped and turned to see who was calling them. Flo fired two shots to Rod's chest and a third to his head. He crumpled like an empty sack. Before Nan could bring herself to scream, Flo shot her twice in the chest and once in the head — the 'Mozambique Drill'. Nan fell where she stood, never having made a sound. To anyone who was not looking at the action, and there were none, it sounded as if Flo had shot only twice.

She pushed her cart to one side to make room for her driver, tossed the pistol under a nearby car, popped open the passenger door of her getaway car, and her driver gunned the engine for the exit, turned west onto US route 6, and disappeared before anyone was able to dial 9-1-1.

Two blocks from the Sav-A-Lot, her driver pulled into a convenience store parking lot and stopped. "Get out," he ordered. "That white convertible is your new ride. Get moving."

Flo opened the door, dropped her rubber gloves in a nearby trash can, and climbed into the white convertible. Both cars then left the area in different directions.

The Pennsylvania State Police seized the videotapes of the parking lot showing the assassination of Rod Palumbo and his wife, but the tape was of such poor quality that the camera might as well not have been turned on. It showed two people pushing a shopping cart down an aisle of the lot followed by another shopper. At one point, the two stopped and turned and the third shopper fired six shots — they knew that from the brass scattered across the parking lot — in under three seconds killing both of the other shoppers, probably before they knew what was happening. The shooter had cavalierly discarded the weapon as if it were a used tissue.

This was clearly a professional hit, probably a mob hit. The authorities began rounding up the usual suspects. No one, it seemed, believed it could have had another cause.

Bob and Bob Jr. knew Flo would be out with the girls Wednesday and Thursday nights and that they were on their own for dinner both nights. When Flo strolled in at about 8 PM, there was still pizza uneaten, so she treated herself to a piece with a nice glass of wine and settled down to watch TV with her boys. She cleared her mind completely of all thoughts of what had happened earlier that evening. It was just a TV show she had seen. It had nothing to do with her.

She wanted a cigarette so badly...

16 - Names and Addresses

Every Sunday the databases for the Treasury Department are "reorganized" — the techs just say 'REORGed' — to improve the efficiency of the processing. For safety's sake, they always do a two-step REORG: first, they unload the databases each to its own 'flat-file' — just raw data. Then they scrub the dataspace and reload it from the flat-file copy. The whole process takes several hours because there are many databases involved, but it saves days of processing if the databases are badly fragmented at the start.

When the HR — Human Resources — databases began their REORG, Jeff picked up the phone and dialed Lulu. "It just started," he told her. There was a pause. "OK, it's done." Jeff disconnected.

Lulu was already "up" on her FTP session. She refreshed the display and saw that the flat-file backup was approximately the right size. With a few keystrokes, she transferred the flat copy to an 8 gigabyte USB drive plugged into her PC. The file transfer took a mere 16 seconds. She unplugged the USB storage device and shut down FTP, logged off the system and shut the PC down. Eight minutes later, she badged out through the security gate, walked to her car in the parking lot, and drove home.

At home, Lulu plugged the device into her computer and opened it to take a look. It appeared to be complete and intact. She scrolled down to her own name and purged the row. Then she found Jeff's name and purged his row. She saved the revised file minus the two deleted rows, and unplugged the device from her computer. She slipped it into an envelope, stepped out into the foyer of her apartment complex where the mailboxes were located, and dropped it into the slot marked "Farquhar". She continued to the parking lot, found her car and drove away. In twenty minutes she was seated in her favorite Italian restaurant enjoying a glass of Chianti.

At George Washington University Hospital Bobbie Farquhar turned her shift over to her replacement on the stroke of 11 PM and headed for the exit. She was now officially on vacation, and she wouldn't be back for three more weeks. Seniority had its benefits.

Arriving home, she let herself into the lobby. Lulu had warned her there might be a package for her. There were two well-dressed men lounging in the lobby, so Bobbie breezed past the mailboxes and went straight for the elevators. She had just a little last-minute

packing left before she could leave for her long-awaited vacation, and she had less than three hours before she must leave for the station.

She didn't like to fly, and this trip, across Canada by rail, had always been on her wish-list. This year she had three weeks vacation for the first time, and she had decided to splurge.

Also on her list was a tour of the Western U.S. — *no, that's not right anymore, is it?* — the National Parks in the Constitutional Alliance: Yellowstone, Glacier, Canyonlands, the Grand Canyon. She wouldn't be able to do them all on this trip, but she hoped she might get to Glacier National Park. For that, she would have to enter from Canada since the border was now officially closed between the Alliance and the rest of the country. When Lulu learned of her itinerary, she asked Bobbie for a favor. Bobbie, of course, said 'yes'.

"Do you want me to bring something back for you?" Bobbie asked.

"No," Lulu replied, "I want you to take something with you."

Lulu wouldn't have asked except that she and Bobbie had been neighbors for years and their conversations over the years had covered every conceivable topic. On political issues, they were sisters (Lulu called them 'co-conspirators'), and Lulu was a rebel. Both of them were disgusted with Farnham's over-the-top tactics that had led them into what they both considered to be an unnecessary and ill-conceived war with the Western States. Nevertheless, Bobbie was more than just a little reticent about what she was being asked to do.

"This isn't treasonous, is it?" she asked Lulu.

"Well," Lulu responded thoughtfully, "it probably is if you were to ask President Farnham. On the other hand, what you're carrying is so innocuous that your chance of being caught is practically zero, especially traveling the way you are, by train. And the good it will do for the country is immense, Bobbie. It could be the trigger that brings us all back together again. If you ask me, it's patriotic, not treasonous. Will you do it?" Bobbie had agreed that she would.

Finished with her packing, Bobbie took a quick shower and changed into her travel clothes. At 2 AM, a limousine waited outside to take her to Union Station for her 3:15 AM AmTrak departure. As she passed through the lobby of the apartment building, she glanced around to make sure it was empty. Even if it weren't, she would have to pick up Lulu's package anyway, risking whatever she might be risking, but at 2 AM, the lobby was deserted. She opened her mailbox, pulled the package free, slipped the envelope into her purse and pulled her two rolling suitcases through the door. The driver loaded her luggage into the cab's trunk and drove her to Union Station.

Her schedule had her arriving in New York City about 6:30 AM. There was not enough time between trains for her to catch even a quick breakfast, but she managed to buy coffee and a pastry before hurrying to her next train, then it was on to Toronto, 12-and-a-half hours away. Sleep on this train, she knew, would be hit-and-miss since it was all coach.

Arriving in Toronto near 8 PM, Bobbie was famished. She had had nothing but snack food to eat all day and was looking forward to a nice dinner, but first she had to check into her hotel. Her next train to Vancouver would not leave until 9:00 AM tomorrow morning, and she wasn't planning to spend all night in the station's waiting room. The Strathcona was, handily, right across the street from the station. She didn't even need a cab to get there. She checked in, left her luggage at the front desk and went directly to their Pub for her first good meal of the day.

The following morning she was up bright and early, started the day with a hearty breakfast and crossed the street to the station for the real start of her vacation. Up to this point, it had been work. She peered into her purse to make sure Lulu's padded envelope was still there.

Settling back into her seat, she let out a long breath as if she had been holding it in for a long time. Finally able to relax, she let her thoughts drift into anticipation of a three-day spell with nothing to do except watch the scenery roll by, read, eat, drink expensive wine, and chat with her traveling companions.

Oh, yes... and deliver the package.

After dinner on the second evening, she asked the porter for a 6:00 AM wake-up call the following morning. She would want to get up early and get dressed, and possibly have something to eat, before meeting the courier in Edmonton. She watched the sunset ahead of the train from the dome of the observation car, then went to the lounge car to check her e-mail. At 9:45, feeling a little tired from a whole day of doing very little, she turned in and went immediately to sleep.

At 6:00 AM, a gentle rapping on her door woke her. "Six o'clock, ma'am," the porter informed her.

"I'm up. Thank you," she told the porter through the closed door.

"Good morning, ma'am," he responded. "Have a nice day."

She brushed her teeth and washed her face and hands, feeling that she wasn't quite in need of a shower just yet. She threw on something casual, added a sweater just in case it was breezy, and

strolled to the dining car for breakfast, Lulu's padded envelope still hiding in her purse.

By 7:40 the nature of the scenery had changed radically. They were entering a much more built-up area, she could tell, with factories and industrial buildings on both sides of the train. The rolling farmland was over, temporarily, and it was now much more a cityscape. She stopped a conductor walking through the car: "Will I have time to do some shopping at the station in Edmonton?" she asked.

"Fifty minute layover, ma'am," he told her. "Make sure you have your ticket and identification so you can get back through the security gate. We depart at 8:55 exactly, whether you're on the train or not."

"Are the station shops forward of the train or behind?"

"Behind, ma'am."

At 8:05 AM, the train ground to a halt in Edmonton. Bobbie had already worked her way as far to the rear of the train as she could manage. She stepped down onto the platform and turned toward the station proper. As she exited through the security gates to the waiting room, she saw a man with a briefcase over his shoulder and a sign reading "Bobbie Prendergast". She angled toward him.

"I'm Bobbie Prendergast," she told him, "And you are...?"

"I'm Steve Jenkins," he said, extending his hand to her.

"That's not who I'm expecting to meet," she said turning away.

"Would it be better if I were John Corson?" he asked. She stopped and turned back toward him.

"It would be much better if you were John Corson. Let me see your ID," she demanded.

He fetched his wallet from his pocket and flipped it open to show her a Montana Driver's License in the name of John Corson. The face on the license matched the one in front of her.

"OK," she told him, satisfied that she was meeting the right person. "Here's your package." She handed him the bubble-wrap envelope.

"Coffee?" he offered.

She gestured toward the coffee shop, and he turned and led the way. Inside the coffee shop, he unzipped his briefcase and extracted a laptop computer. He ripped the zipper on the envelope and poured the little device out. With a few keystrokes, he was examining its contents.

"Looks good," he assured her and began to put everything away. He drew an envelope from his shirt pocket and handed it to her.

"What's this?" she asked.

"A little something to compensate you for your trouble," he told her.

She pushed it back toward him. "I can't take this," she sounded annoyed. "I didn't do this for money!"

"Of course you didn't," he pushed the envelope back. "But you took risks, and we're grateful that you did. It's the only way we can say 'thanks', and it isn't all that much, either. Take it. Buy yourself a nice dinner in Vancouver with it."

She pulled the flap of the envelope open and looked inside. She quickly counted five hundred Canadian dollars. "Thanks," she told him.

"No, it's we who thank you," he answered her. "This may work to prevent the Eastern States being able to pressure us."

"How?" she asked.

"It will allow groups such as yours to stress the establishment to the point that they cannot coordinate an offensive maneuver against us."

"Wow," Bobbie exclaimed. "I didn't know what I was carrying was that powerful."

"You don't know what it is?" he asked incredulously.

"I never asked. They never said," she told him.

"Do you want to know?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "No," she told him. "I'm on vacation. I did a favor for a friend. The less I know, the better off everyone will be."

Corson laughed. "You're probably right, Ms. Prendergast."

"It's 'Farquhar', actually," she corrected him.

"Either way," he continued, "I hope you have a great vacation." He handed her his business card. "If you ever make it into the Alliance and want to see Montana, please do give me a call. I'll be more than happy to be your guide or to find someone more to your liking." He rose and held out his hand. She took it and held it briefly. He turned and walked toward the station parking lot. She took a final sip of coffee from her cup, left the cafe and headed back to her train.

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Dave Steinberg dropped the letter of resignation on his boss' desk.

"What's this?" the boss asked.

"Letter of resignation," Dave told him flatly. "I quit — effective immediately."

"What's wrong, Dave?" his boss asked. "You know you don't get to transfer your benefits if you don't give two weeks' notice?"

"Have you seen today's paper?" Dave asked him. "Three more dead yesterday. My name's on that list, Ron. I'm out of here while I can still go under my own power. You ought to think about it yourself."

"Nah," Ron scoffed, "I'm in it 'til the bitter end. Good luck, Dave. We'll miss you."

"Yah, you'll miss all the revenue I bring in," Dave shot back as he and Ron shook hands for the last time as employee and boss.

Dave gathered up all his personal belongings from his office area and stuffed them all into a cardboard box. He hefted the box onto his shoulder and headed for the elevator, waving good-bye to his friends and co-workers as he went. Ron went with him to the lobby where he badged Dave out of the building for the last time. Then he took the badge and Dave's letter up to HR to start the pile of paperwork he knew he had in front of him. "Shit!" he muttered to himself.

"Mr. President, the Treasury Department is reporting anywhere from two hundred to six hundred resignations per day," the Treasury Secretary whined. "At this rate, in six months I'll be the only one left."

"Now, Dan," Farnham comforted him, "Most of those jobs do not require college degrees. Just hire people off the street."

"Well, that's the other side of the problem," Grover responded. "We've been calling people who have put in applications. You'd be stunned at the number of people who tell us they've changed their minds. These random killings of identified IRS agents is putting us in an untenable position, personnel-wise. I don't know how to respond to this."

"Has the FBI come up with anything yet?" Farnham asked.

"They've arrested *someone* in every case of an IRS agent being targeted," Grover reported, "but there are so far no eyewitnesses that have come forward, so what the FBI has is just circumstantial: an agent was shot with such-and-such caliber weapon. We have arrested someone who was the subject of an investigation or seizure by that agent. That someone owned a firearm of the proper caliber that hasn't been surrendered. If we can locate the firearm, we've got a Public Safety conviction at best. We run a ballistics test on the firearm and get a no-match or a near-match. Neither of those would stand up in court. The defense would pound us to dust even on a near-match after all the years we've touted how well we can ID a specific firearm exactly on the basis of ballistics."

"You mean we can't?" Farnham asked, surprised.

"We never actually could," Grover admitted. "The markings on a bullet left by the rifling changes ever-so-slightly with every shot. Fire a bullet and save it. Fire twenty or thirty more and try to match the last to the first. If you get a near-match you're lucky. If the shooter takes a rat-tail file, sticks it in the muzzle and scrapes around a little, the next round out of that barrel will be so far out in left field, ballistically, that you may have trouble proving it came from the same *kind* of gun."

"Doesn't matter," Farnham mused. "Every time we arrest someone and find a gun, it's one fewer gun out there, and the person is in jail for violation of the Firearms Act. Eventually, we'll have them all collected, and then this will stop."

"That's a half-million dead government employees," Grover told him. "Do we have that many?"

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Dave Steinberg took the hand-painted sign out to his front lawn. He brought a sledge hammer with him. The sign said, in large, clear lettering: "I resigned. I don't work for IRS anymore". He placed the pointed end of the stake into the ground and tapped it with the hammer a few times, then he took a wide stance and whacked it good and hard several times to make sure the post was firmly set.

He stepped back to check that the signpost was straight up-and-down, and was just considering that he should probably tap it to the right to get it straighter when a .30-caliber Winchester Silvertip entered the back of his skull.

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Two FBI agents rapped on Duffy Munro's door. They waited a minute, then rapped again. Duffy, certain now that they weren't going to give up and go away, finally answered the door. "What?" he demanded.

The two agents showed their ID. "Mr. Munro? We're investigating the violent death of IRS agent Martin O'Rourke. Does that name ring a bell with you, Mr. Munro?"

Munro rubbed his chin as if in deep thought. "O'Rourke, you said? Was he the pirate that seized my business over what he claimed was a delinquent tax assessment?" Munro asked. The agents nodded in the affirmative. "He's dead, you say? Couldn't happen to a nicer guy," Munro chortled. "So, why are you here? Am I a suspect?"

"As a matter-of-fact, Mr. Munro, you are the suspect," one of the agents confirmed. "O'Rourke was shot with a .357 Magnum. You used to own a .357 Magnum."

"I sold that years ago," Munro interrupted. "I even have the paperwork."

"Yes, we know. You have a document you claim is a duplicate bill-of-sale showing it sold to... oddly, we are unable to make out the name, and the address is an office building." The agent waited a moment to give Munro an opportunity to respond, and when he did not, continued: "So we are here today to see if we can verify the eventual disposition of that particular firearm. May we come in?"

"Do you have a search warrant?" Munro challenged.

"By an odd coincidence, we do, Mr. Munro." The second agent handed him a folded document. Munro opened it to read it, then stepped inside to let the agents in.

"Where would you like to start?" Munro asked.

"We'd like to start with you handing over the firearm, Mr. Munro," one of them suggested. "Failing that, we'll start with your bedroom."

Munro started up the stairs. "This way," he directed them.

They began rummaging through the drawers of his dresser. "Do you need me here?" Munro asked them.

"Don't you want to stay and make sure we don't plant evidence?" they asked.

"What?" Munro responded, "you're going to plant a gun of the right make, model, and serial number? If you had that gun you wouldn't be here." The agents shrugged. Munro turned and walked out of the room. Quietly, one of the agents rose and followed him, stopping at the top of the stairs and listening for conversation, but he heard nothing he could make out.

A few minutes later, both agents descended the stairs and found Maeve Munro in the kitchen. "Where can we find Mr. Munro?" one of them asked.

"In his workshop in the garage," she told them and pointed toward a door.

They went through the door into the garage and found Duffy Munro about to place a piece of wood into a lathe. He stopped what he was doing and turned to face them.

"Finished already?" he asked.

"No," the lead agent replied, "we just get curious when the subject of a search warrant is so unconcerned that he walks away. Generally, we find that means the subject has gone to do some last-minute hiding. We're always interested in what someone might be hiding at the last minute, wouldn't you be?"

Duffy shrugged his shoulders. "No," he offered and turned back to his lathe.

The agents pattered around the workshop, peering into cabinets, looking under shelves. There weren't many places one might hide things in an unfinished garage. Duffy finished turning the wood and unchucked it from the lathe. He made a show of examining it for defects, then placed it carefully on a shelf with two others just like it. He pulled his stock box toward him and pulled a piece of stock from it, looked it over once or twice, pulled a different piece, replaced the first piece, examined the second piece. The agents lost interest in the garage and went back to the upstairs bedroom. When he was sure they had left, Duffy lifted a handful of stock and peered into the stock box to reassure himself that the .357 and the two boxes of ammunition were still there, safely stowed in their custom-built compartment.

The agents spent about four hours looking in every nook and cranny of the Munro house but found nothing illegal. Around three in the afternoon, they decided it was a lost cause or at least something they weren't going to get results from easily. The lead agent found Duffy still in his garage-workshop making some final corrections to a spindle with a sheet of super-fine sandpaper.

"Do you have that search warrant?" the agent asked Duffy.

Duffy stopped what he was doing but didn't turn around. He used the few seconds this gave him to ask himself a few questions and formulate a theory. "Why?" he asked the agent.

"We're not finished," the agent admitted. "We'll have to come back tomorrow."

Duffy turned finally to face the agent. "What's the problem?" he asked the agent. "You can get a fresh one, right?"

"That one is still good," he told Duffy. "There's no expiration date on it. I'll just take it with me and re-use it tomorrow."

"Sorry," Duffy told him turning back to his workbench so the agent couldn't see the smirk on his face, "I don't have it anymore."

The agent grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around. "Listen here, asshole," the agent barked at him clutching the front of Duffy's shirt in his huge fist, "you give me that god-damned search warrant or I'll break every bone in your body." From the looks of the agent, Duffy thought he might be able to carry out his threat.

"Okay," Duffy agreed, and the agent let go of Duffy's shirt. Duffy bent down and from underneath the workbench, he brought out a sharpened spindle in the shape of a magician's wand that he had been turning for one of his grandchildren. With one smooth motion, he turned, rose, and slammed the shaft up through the underside of the agent's jaw, through the soft palate, and into the base of the

brain. The agent's knees buckled, and he fell to the floor, only partially supported by the piece of wood Duffy held at his throat. A spreading dark stain on the agent's trousers told Duffy that the agent was no longer in control of his voluntary muscles, at least, and might even be dead. In fact, the pupils of the eyes were now fixed and dilated. *Yeah, he's dead, alright*, Duffy assured himself.

Duffy quickly frisked the corpse and discovered a semi-automatic pistol in a shoulder holster and a suppressor in the agent's jacket pocket. Duffy took the suppressor and screwed it onto the pistol's threaded barrel. He opened the door to the kitchen a crack and peeked through to see if anyone beside his wife were there. Only Maeve was visible, standing at the counter and humming quietly to herself as she stirred something on the stove. Duffy stepped through the door, and Maeve turned to see Duffy holding an evil-looking handgun and with his finger to his lips.

"Where's the other one?" Duffy whispered to her.

"Upstairs, I think," she replied equally silently. She had a very frightened look on her face.

Carefully, Duffy crept up the stairs to where the other agent was searching closets and probing for recently-repaired sections of wallboard. With his right hand hidden behind the doorjamb, Duffy asked the agent: "Have you searched the bathroom, yet?"

The agent turned and looked at Duffy, mildly surprised that his partner wasn't there with him.

"No, I haven't gotten to the bathroom yet. Maybe tomorrow," he suggested. "Why?"

"Oh, I dunno," Duffy replied casually. "A bathroom just seems to be a good place to stash contraband, y'know?"

The agent had a dozen thoughts all fighting for attention simultaneously. The one that took the top spot was this: *why would he suggest the bathroom unless he wants me to blow off his suggestion as 'uninformed' and ignore it?* Instead, he rose and headed for the bathroom.

As he entered the bathroom, tiled wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling, Duffy fired one shot at the base of the agent's skull.

The 200-grain .40-caliber bullet was so slow it was almost possible to watch it make the trip from the gun to the target. And because it was so slow the suppressor screwed to the muzzle of the pistol reduced the normally loud report to a noisy little *pop*. And because it was so slow, the bullet had not enough speed to exit the target, and it lodged inside the skull. The agent's lifeless body pitched forward into the tub. *Maeve will be pleased*, Duffy thought, *that I haven't made a horrible mess of the bathroom.*

This agent also carried a pistol with a threaded barrel and a suppressor to fit. Duffy added it to his collection knowing full-well that were he ever to be caught, either one would be *prima facie* evidence that he had killed two federal agents.

He and Maeve managed to get both bodies stuffed into the trunk of the agents' car Maeve had backed into the garage. Other than the guns the agents carried, Duffy and Maeve had removed only the agents' drivers' licenses from their wallets. 'PW' would want them, Duffy felt sure. Law enforcement officers' names were especially hard to connect with an address whether they were local or federal or anything in between. Their licenses would make finding their families that much easier, and it had recently become 'policy' among the loosely-organized resisters that retribution didn't stop with the malefactors themselves, but now extended to whichever family members could be identified: wives, children, parents, and siblings. It made for an excellent object lesson. As brave as the agents considered themselves, their families would be terror-stricken at the thought that if Daddy were killed the remainder of the family would have to be taken into the Witness Protection Program, and these days there were precious few places you could stash a one-parent family without arousing the wrong kind of suspicion.

Duffy and Maeve convoyed the car to a nearby forest preserve where it was allowed to roll into a quiet lake and disappear into the depths, taking the agents' bodies with it.

The investigation that followed was cursory at best. The FBI was stretched exceedingly thin due to a large number of resignations and a few outright demurrers by agents who refused to violate the Constitution they had sworn to uphold, repeal of the 2nd amendment be damned. Duffy admitted the IRS agents were there and even showed the investigators the search warrant, but both Duffy and Maeve asserted that the agents had completed early and left. Duffy suggested the agents had left around two in the afternoon. Maeve didn't realize they were gone, she said, until closer to four, but couldn't say exactly when they might have left.

Neither corpse had left much in the way of bloodstains in the Munro house and clean-up had been thorough with a capital-T.

One day soon, Duffy and Maeve realized, they would be called to account for what they had done, but today was not the day.

17 - Round Up

"Well, isn't that interesting?" Lars Thorsen mumbled to himself, but loud enough for his partner to hear.

His cube-mate didn't look up from what he was doing but managed to ask: "Isn't what interesting?"

"I've been doing comparisons between that list of IRS agents that was being circulated on the Web and the backup files from the last few months," Thorsen explained. "Most of the files have a few missing lines and a few extra lines. The ones with missing lines — the ones where the Web file has names that aren't on the backup files — those backup files can't be the source of the Web file. Where would the extra names on the Web file have come from?"

"The ones with the extra lines — where the Web file is missing names — that could mean some names were purged from the Web file before it was released to the world." His partner nodded.

"There's only one backup that has extra lines but no missing lines: Sunday, seven weeks ago, there was a backup taken that has exactly two extra names compared to the Web file and no missing names. One of the extra names is Lulu Pleasance, Facilities Maintenance. The other is Jeff Sokol, IT Database Management. Sokol was working when this backup file was taken about 4 PM that Sunday. His name and the other name are both on the backup before this one and on the backup after this one. Those names were removed from the Web version before it was released, and Sokol did it. He's the only one of the two with enough security clearance to be able to access the backup files."

His partner thought about this for a few seconds. "What about the girl?" he asked. "How does she fit into this?"

"I don't know. Maybe a girlfriend," Thorsen speculated. "Whoever is not on this list is relatively safe because they have not been outed as IRS employees. Thorsen swung around in his chair and started dialing his contact in Personnel. Even an investigator like Thorsen didn't have so much authority that he could look at anything. He was going to need help on this one.

"Look up Jeff Sokol," he instructed his contact in Personnel, "serial 1074413."

"Fired," the Personnel man informed him, "a week ago Tuesday. No longer with us. Had a fight with another employee in the cafeteria and was escorted out of the building, along with the guy he was fighting with."

"How convenient. Well, he's your man," Thorsen informed him. "He's the guy that stole the list of employees that's up on the Web. While you're there, look up Lulu Pleasance, serial 1118080."

"She's still active. What's her connection to this?" the Personnel man asked.

"I don't quite know yet," Thorsen admitted, "but I'm going to find out."

Thorsen dialed his supervisor at the FBI and briefed him on the latest discovery. His supervisor jotted notes so he could explain to the judge why they needed search warrants. He also planned to put teams on each to find out where they went and who they met.

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AllTel no longer had any responsibility for Jake Mack's privacy since he was dead. Of that there simply was no doubt. Company policy allowed them to turn over any records whatsoever for the account of a deceased person. When the Sunrise County Sheriff requested Jake's call detail for the last 24 hours before he died in a hail of bullets, AllTel handed over the information without hesitation.

Most of Jake's calls for the last few hours of his life were less than two minutes long, and the bulk of those were under one minute. He had called his brother in Minnesota less than twenty minutes before his final shoot-out with the Sunrise County SWAT. That was the longest call of the day, almost six minutes long. Almost immediately after disconnecting, his brother had called Jake back, but Jake had let it go to voicemail.

All of the one-minute calls in the last three hours of his life were given top priority. The two-minute calls were next in importance. Some of them, of course, could be trimmed away almost immediately. For instance, there were two calls to a Tess Campbell. Campbell had been killed during a confrontation with deputies who had been sent to pick up the guns their records — ATF's records, actually — had said she still had.

Between AllTel's records and the call history in Jake Mack's cell phone, the last few hours of phone activity was captured in fine detail. The chronological track said he took a call from a Mort Spall, then made several outgoing calls including two to Tess Campbell, then several more outgoing calls, most replicating the earlier list and including Mort Spall.

"Telephone tree," one of the deputies snorted. "No doubt about it. Spall calls Jake Mack, then Mack calls a handful of people down-chain: *bim, bim, bim*. He called Campbell about... oh, four minutes after the shooting stopped at her place, then again about nine

minutes later. Then he calls that same handful of people back, again in rapid succession: *bim, bim, bim*. See the time? Between this call and the next, there's an eleven minute gap, and that's almost exactly the time when he shot two deputies outside his condo. The next call: Mort Spall."

"Let's go round 'em up," the chief deputy ordered. The nine surviving Sunrise County deputies rose and headed for the door.

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When Lulu Pleasance arrived at her desk Wednesday morning, she signed on to the system from the computer at her desk as she always did. Among the messages in her e-mail inbox was one from her boss setting up a 9:30 meeting at a conference room some considerable distance from her desk. The subject was 'Staff realignment'. She considered this a bad sign.

At 9:20, a reminder of her impending meeting popped up on her computer screen. She got up from her desk, grabbed a notepad and a pen, and headed for the remote conference room. There were four other people in the conference room when she got there, and she didn't recognize any of them. Her boss hadn't arrived yet.

"Does anyone know what this meeting is all about?" she asked. In response, they each produced FBI identification, and one of them closed the door.

"The subject of the meeting happens to be you," one of the agents informed her. "You and Jeff Sokol, that is. Do you know Jeff Sokol?"

"We've dated a few times," Lulu admitted. "Does that count?"

"Intimate?" the agent asked.

Lulu shook her head. "No. Look, do I need a lawyer?" she asked them.

"Have you done anything wrong?" one of the agents asked.

"Don't give me that line," Lulu scoffed. "Lots of people are in federal lock-up, and the only thing they did wrong was talk to the FBI. I think I'll wait until my lawyer can be with me."

An agent leaned over the table toward her. "You know, Lulu, you can be cooperative or you can be uncooperative. The difference between those two could be life-or-death because we're talking here about accessory-before-the-fact to the murder... the assassination of over 30 federal employees. What do you think your chances are if you get labeled uncooperative?"

"What do you think my chances will be if I say something my lawyer advises against?" she demanded of the agent. The agent

shrugged. "If you're going to arrest me," Lulu told them, "do it, and get it over with."

"Tell us where we can find Jeff Sokol, and you can walk out of here," she was told.

Lulu shook her head. "I haven't seen or heard from Jeff since he got fired two weeks ago. Heck, I hadn't heard from him for weeks before he got fired," she lied.

The four agents exchanged looks among themselves. One of them brought out handcuffs. "Hands behind your back," he ordered. Lulu put her hands behind her back, and the agent snapped the cuffs on her. Lulu started to cry.

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Mort Spall loaded the last of his suitcases into the trunk and slammed it shut. He settled himself behind the steering wheel and started the car. As he rolled away from his house for what he was sure was the last time — *and it was paid-for, dammit* — he slipped the .357 Magnum from his belt, stuffed it between the driver's seat and the center console and casually covered it with a partially unfolded newspaper.

In twenty minutes, he would be able to pick up a good highway to take him west to Memphis and I-40. In Little Rock, he planned to catch I-30 down to Arkadelphia and from there, he would work his way west on rural roads toward the Oklahoma border. There were thousands of crossing points between the Alliance and the Eastern States on roads that ran west from US 59/71. All he had to do was stay cool and not call attention to himself until he got there.

This was really the only realistic option, he told himself. *The men and women he had worked with in their abortive effort to — what?* At this point, given the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, Mort couldn't even put into words what he thought they might have accomplished. *Cause chaos*, he concluded. Many of the men and women in the militia — too many of them — had had their names and faces on the evening news programs in the last day or two, usually to report their deaths at the hands of local police, state police, the feds, or National Guard troops.

The whole of western Tennessee was now a police state. They hadn't used the term 'martial law', but it was *close enough for government work* as the old saying went.

He turned west on US 64, accelerated to highway speed and began to relax for the first time in days. *Just don't think about it*, he told himself. *The less you think about it, the calmer you'll be.*

US route 64 in western Tennessee is long and straight or with barely perceptible curves. It's an easy road to speed on if you're not careful, and Mort was painfully aware of that, having gotten two tickets in the same year on this very stretch of road. The radar detector stuck to the windshield would 'chirp' every now and then to remind him to check his speed, so he was very surprised to see a patrol car pull out of a driveway as he went by and turn in his direction. He checked his speed. He was two or three miles-per-hour over the limit... certainly not enough, he felt, to warrant attention from the State Police. When the cruiser's blue lights began flashing in his rear view mirror, Mort slowed and pulled to the side. The cruiser pulled in behind him.

Mort considered whether he should prep the .357 or play it straight. There was only one trooper in the car, but if Mort got involved in a shoot-out, the dashboard camera that was certainly operating would quickly identify him, and he still had a hard day's driving ahead of him before he reached Oklahoma. He decided to let the trooper write him a ticket. In another day, he would be where the ticket meant nothing, and he was probably never coming back. He left the newspaper covering the gun, took his driver's license from his wallet, and rolled down the driver's window. The trooper walked forward to Mort's car.

"Mornin', sir," the trooper greeted Mort. "Do you know why I stopped you?"

"No," Mort admitted, "I don't. If I was speeding, it was by such a small amount that I wouldn't expect anyone to notice."

"No, sir," the trooper told him, "I'm not stopping you for 'speed'. You have a radar detector in your car. They're illegal in this state."

"Really?" Mort asked, surprised. "They've been legal for as long as I can remember."

"Well, they're illegal now," the trooper told him. "The Governor has declared them a threat to public order. Step out of the car, please, sir," the trooper directed him.

Alarm bells started ringing in Mort's head. *A trooper doesn't pull you out of your car for anything like this, he thought. I'm about to be arrested, and the car will be towed and impounded... and searched, and they will find the gun, and I'll wind up in jail for a very long time.*

Mort unclipped his seat belt with his right hand and pulled the belt free with his left hand. As his left hand reached for the door latch, his right hand burrowed under the partly-folded newspaper and gripped the revolver.

The trooper, a veteran of almost fifteen years on the road, saw Mort's hand slip down beside the driver's seat, and knew the meaning of the act. He drew his service weapon and made two good head shots before Mort could bring his gun to bear.

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Bobbie Farquhar was exhausted. She had been up since nearly dawn to catch the bus to Whistler. She had spent most of the day hiking in Garibaldi Provincial Park and then back to Whistler. She had some great pictures in her camera, she was sure, but everything now hurt. She had pains in places where she didn't even realize she had places. The bus from Whistler dropped her off just a few blocks from her hotel. She was really looking forward to a bath tonight. No shower. She wanted to soak some of the pain away.

Tomorrow she would board her train for the return trip across Canada to Toronto where she would change trains for New York City and Washington, D.C., home. This might be a good excuse for ordering dinner from Room Service.

Up in her room, she snapped on the TV to catch the news.

After the local news and weather, the coverage switched to world news. The top of this coverage, for a Canadian station, would always be their neighbor to the south, especially in these times.

"In the United States, the FBI today announced an arrest in connection with the exposure of the personnel roster of the U.S. Treasury Department." Bobbie's head snapped around at this, and she was just in time to see Lulu Pleasance's face on the TV screen. "Lulu Pleasance, a Treasury Department employee, is accused of being part of a team that stole confidential files and distributed them to the secessionist states. Others are being sought, and more arrests are expected, according to an FBI spokesperson."

Bobbie grabbed her handbag and started fishing for the business card she hoped she hadn't thrown away. In a moment, she found it and examined it for the first time. It said:

John Corson
Tours for the
discriminating traveler.
406-GUIDE-ME (484-3363)

She picked up her cell phone, flipped it open, and began to dial. A soft *burring* sound told her the call had gone through. After a few rings, a voice announced: "Big Sky Concierge, this is John."

"John," Bobbie began, "this is Bobbie Farquhar."

"Who?" Corson challenged.

"Bobbie Prendergast," she corrected, "although that isn't really my name."

"Oh," his voice suddenly brightened, "the girl on the train."

"Yes, that's me," Bobbie confirmed. "John, have you been watching the news?" she asked.

"You caught me out on the road, Bobbie," Corson informed her. "There isn't a TV or a radio for thirty miles at least, and I'm not sure there's even one that close. Why? What am I missing?"

"Well," Bobbie began with a hint of a sigh in her voice, "the person who gave me that device has been arrested. The newscast said the FBI is looking for more people who were involved. John, I think they were talking about me. I don't think I can go back."

"I have to check with my other contacts. Can I reach you on the number in caller-ID?" Corson asked. Bobbie confirmed that he could, and they disconnected.

Twenty minutes later, Bobbie's phone rang. She picked up the call immediately.

"Hello?" she began.

"Bobbie Prendergast?" the voice asked.

Oh, I give up, she thought. "Yes," she answered with a sigh.

"My name is Terri Fuller," a woman's voice continued. "John asked me to contact you to see what we can do about a change of itinerary. He said you're traveling by train?" she asked.

"Yes," Bobbie answered. "I'm on tomorrow's 5:30 PM train out of Vancouver. Should I cancel that?"

"No. Be on that train," Terri instructed. "You will be in Edmonton in 24 hours. Someone will meet you at the station. You will want to tell VIA Rail that you are disembarking at Edmonton for an extended stay. That way they won't stow your luggage where you can't get to it easily. Disembark at Edmonton with all your luggage. You'll be in Montana before midnight. We're looking forward to seeing you. Good luck." The line dropped.

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Under the influence of sodium pentothal, Lulu had given up everything she knew or suspected about the theft of the Treasury Department's personnel file. It was a toss-up whether the FBI would be able to use that testimony against her in court, but it hardly mattered. She was a domestic terrorist by Presidential *diktat* and would soon disappear into the bowels of the American gulag. More important was that she had thoroughly implicated Jeff Sokol and had given them another, heretofore unknown, name: Bobbie Farquhar.

Farquhar lived in the same apartment complex as Lulu Pleasance and was now a person of interest. A nurse who worked at George Washington University Hospital, Farquhar was presently on vacation for three weeks and was due back at work early the following week. Her co-workers had passed along that Bobbie's vacation was a rail trip across Canada, but nobody, it seemed, had better information than that. A warrant had been issued for her arrest, and all the Ports of Entry had been notified to BOLO — *be on the look-out* for her.

She had not used a credit card since Valemount, west of Jasper, on her way to Vancouver and the FBI had asked the RCMP to concentrate their efforts to locate her in Vancouver. Her ticket allowed her to exit the train and continue her trip later, but this was already 'later'. She was almost certainly in Vancouver now, unless she had started her return trip, and then God alone knew where she might be. In Toronto, she had extracted 1500 Canadian dollars, and she was, apparently, living off that for the remainder of her trip, so there wasn't even an ATM withdrawal to tell anyone where she might be. She was leaving no trail at all behind her.

In the morning, Bobbie checked out of her hotel and took a cab to the VIA Rail station. There she stowed her luggage in two large lockers, and left to walk around downtown Vancouver. She had virtually all day to see what was left of Vancouver before she had to board the train.

At half-past-four, Bobbie was back at the station. She retrieved her luggage from the lockers and wandered over to the boarding gate. The porters marked her bags for Edmonton, and Bobbie walked down the platform to her stateroom.

The RCMP operative assigned to watch her reported that she had boarded the train, but he didn't know she planned to leave the train in Edmonton.

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Jeff Sokol opened the front door of his parents' house in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania and descended the steps to the street. He looked both ways for anyone who might be lurking nearby, but he didn't see anything untoward. Nevertheless, the news report he had just seen had spooked him adequately. They had Lulu, and it was only a matter of time before they cracked her, and he would be exposed. His only choice now was to run.

As he put the key into the door of his car, a movement in the corner of his eye caused him to turn his head. Two figures were running toward him. He left the car, turned in the other direction and took off running.

"Halt!" one of the agents called and drew his pistol. Jeff Sokol angled off in a new direction and increased his stride. The agent fired six times at Sokol's retreating figure and Sokol fell.

"Don't shoot!" the lead agent screamed, but it was too late. When the five agents caught up to Sokol's body, it was clear that he was mortally wounded.

"Idiot!" the lead agent barked at the shooter. "Dead he's no use to us at all."

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At half-past-five, the train rolled into Edmonton and came smoothly to a halt. Bobbie Farquhar stepped down to the platform and walked toward the baggage car. There she found her two rolling suitcases waiting for her. She took them and headed for the exit. As she entered the main station, her eyes swept over the people waiting to meet arriving passengers and came to rest on John Corson. She angled toward him.

He didn't greet her. He didn't say anything. He just took one of her suitcases from her and headed for the exit. She followed.

At the exit, a taxicab waited. The cab driver took both suitcases and stowed them in the trunk. John and Bobbie got into the cab.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

"Airport. General Aviation," John replied. The taxi driver had a disgusted look on his face. The trip was so short it almost wasn't worth the effort. In five minutes they were unloading the luggage from the cab.

John led Bobbie to a Cessna 172 parked on the apron. He stowed the luggage behind the seats, started the engine and began to taxi toward the runway. "Cessna seven-eight-romeo ready for takeoff, runway one-two," he told the tower. The tower cleared him for takeoff, he throttled up, raced down the runway, and was airborne headed for Montana moments later.

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Grace Pomponio rushed to the front door to answer the doorchime, hoping the sound would not wake the baby. Hoping other things, too, but not expecting much, either. Tom, her husband, had been missing for two days since failing to return from an assignment — no one at the FBI office would say what he was doing exactly — and Grace was prepared for bad news. The number of FBI agents — *and not just FBI*, she thought — who had been involved in deadly-force

actions over the last few weeks had all their spouses on edge or saying extra prayers or both.

The two well-dressed men at the door flashed FBI ID. The younger of them addressed her: "Mrs. Pomponio? We have some news about Tom. May we come in?"

Tears welled up in her eyes and she nodded and stepped aside for them to enter, closing the door behind them.

"Is he...?" she couldn't bring herself to say the word.

The older man nodded. Grace finally broke down, collapsing onto a nearby chair and sobbing. The older man pulled up another chair and sat facing her.

"The children," he began. "Will you need someone to stay with the children?"

She shook her head. "There's only the baby... upstairs in the nursery."

The older man got up from his chair and moved away. The younger man pointed his suppressed .40 caliber pistol at Grace's head and pulled the trigger. She fell off to the side onto the floor. The older man mounted the stairs two at a time, but gracefully and silently. The second door he opened was the nursery.

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When Diane Mason opened the front door, she was greeted by a brief glimpse of official-looking identification. "Are you from the local office?" she asked them.

"No, ma'am," the younger told her. "We just transferred in from other offices to help out with the — uh — manpower shortage," he added sheepishly.

"Mrs. Mason," the older man interrupted, "we have some information about your husband. May we come in?"

"Oh, yes, of course," and she stepped aside to let them pass. As they reached the foyer, guns in the hands of FBI agents appeared on either side, pointed at the newcomers' heads.

"Hands where we can see them!" they were ordered. Two other agents entered the front door behind them. In moments the assassins were handcuffed and disarmed and bundled off to the FBI office for processing.

The lead agent in charge of protecting Diane Mason and her family from the hit squads that were methodically wiping out agents' — usually *dead* agents' — families put his hand on Diane's shoulder.

"Diane, that was one of the bravest things I've ever seen a civilian do. You kept your head and helped us capture these killers

and there's just no telling how many other families you saved by your actions today. The bureau owes you an enormous debt of gratitude."

Diane Mason nodded, just a little acknowledgement of the agent's praise.

"I have to tell you, though," he continued, "that along with danger those two brought bad news, too." Diane raised her head to look into his eyes. He had one of the pistols taken from the killers, and he held it upside down so she could see its bottom. "This is Dave's gun," he told her sadly. Diane understood what that meant.

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It was now policy at FBI that for anyone associated with the death or disappearance of any agent: FBI, ATF, IRS, anybody, their interrogation would be 'drug assisted'. They didn't have to worry about whether the information gleaned from these unconventional processes would hold up in court. These cases would never see the inside of a courtroom, thanks to the USA PATRIOT Act. These domestic terrorists would go directly from the interrogation room to a prison cell in a little-known military brig from which it was highly unlikely they would ever be freed. In fact, in some cases, the FBI interrogator would simply push a little more of the drug, and let the perp slip into Stage IV anesthesia. Oops...

Steve Dugommier wasn't there quite yet. He was babbling, an unfortunate side-effect of sodium thiopental, and no valuable information was coming out... yet.

"Where did you get the gun?" the interrogator asked.

"What gun?" Steve asked.

"You know... the one you used on Grace Pomponio."

"Oh... that... the dispatcher gave it to me. The dispatcher gives you everything you need for a job," Steve mumbled.

"I could use a job myself," the interrogator offered. "Could the dispatcher find a job for me, do you think?"

"Maybe," Steve suggested. "Maybe you should ask him."

"Yeah, maybe I should," the interrogator agreed. "How do I find this guy who can get me a job?"

"Call him," Steve sounded a little exasperated at this idiot. Didn't he know anything?

"OK, I will," the interrogator assured him. "What's his number?"

"4-4-8-7... I forget the rest," Steve mumbled.

In the next room two agents, each holding one of the killers' cell phones, started flipping through the phones' directories. One grabbed a marker and scribbled on the white board "448-7502" and

continued scrolling, looking for another match. A moment later, his partner snatched the marker and wrote underneath "448-7502".

"Find him and pick him up," the AIC instructed them.

They didn't even need a search warrant. NSA knew everything there was to know about every telephone number in the United States, and most of the numbers everywhere else. A surveillance team operating out of a service van quickly set up an observation post where they could have a good view of Paul Wagram's house and another watched his place of employment. The files at the state Department of Motor Vehicles had yielded his picture. Within an hour, Wagram left his house and drove to the supermarket. As he wheeled his shopping cart down an aisle, two men converged on him and had him in custody before he realized he was being stalked.

As with Dugommier's interrogation, Wagram was given a drug to loosen his tongue. Sometimes the tongue became too loose, and the suspect would just babble. It was hard in those situations to know what was worthwhile and what was nonsense. A practiced liar could sometimes manage to avoid saying things he wouldn't ordinarily want to say, and someone who honestly believed a non-fact, of course, would deliver that non-fact as if it were truth.

Wagram was neither of these. He knew plenty, and it wasn't long before he gave up Duffy Munro's name. That rang several bells among the FBI agents. Munro was the last assignment agents Mason and Pomponio had taken before disappearing off the face of the Earth, and now Duffy was linked via Wagram and Dugommier to the two pistols that had been used in at least one assassination: Grace Pomponio and her baby.

As for Duffy, after the incident with the two unfortunate FBI agents, he never now went anywhere unarmed, and Maeve had acquired a small pistol for herself. They both understood that the next knock on the door could be the one they dreaded.

When it finally came, it would cost the FBI one more agent — luckily, just a relatively-new recruit — in exchange for the lives of Duffy and Maeve.

18 - Things Fall Apart

The sun had long since set when Gloria Talamanco's phone rang. She already knew who it was because her secretary had asked her if she wanted to speak to Barry Wassermann, Alaska's governor.

"Good evening, Barry. How have you been?" she greeted him.

"Suffering under the weight of adverse opinion polls, Gloria," he admitted. "But it's good to hear your voice again."

Since the break up of the United States a little more than one year ago, Alaskans had been repeatedly bashing their Governor in web-based opinion polls over his decision to stay with the United States. It had gotten so bad that it now appeared this Democratic governor would be ousted by a resurgent Alaskan Independence Party challenger. It was a near-certainty that, should the AIP win the next election, martial law would immediately be imposed upon the entire state and enforced by federal troops to prevent Alaska withdrawing from the Union. Barry Wassermann didn't fear losing the election as much as he feared becoming 'the man responsible for Alaska being reduced to the status of a territory once again'.

There seemed to be no way — *scratch that*, he thought — only one way to avoid that happening.

"So," Gloria prompted him, "to what do I owe the honor of your call, Barry?"

"I think you've already figured that out, Gloria," Wassermann teased. "You're far smarter than your opponents give you credit for. That's why you're the governor." He could hear Gloria chuckling on the other end of the line. "I'm calling to let you know that I'm in consultation with certain elements of the Alaska legislature on the topic of independence. If things go as I suspect, we may become eligible to join the Constitutional Alliance. How does that strike you?"

"I can't say that I'm surprised, Barry," Gloria Talamanco offered. "In fact, the big surprise was that Alaska didn't bail with the rest of us. The topic is raised almost every time we governors have a conference call. So, what has changed in the last year?"

"That's a rhetorical question, right?" Barry joked. "Aside from the fact that we now have over a quarter-million Auxiliary State Police officers in a population of just over six hundred thousand, not much. We've had to retool the state database to cope with the need for 6- and 7-digit employee numbers, but that's the least of our worries. Farnham and his cronies have just about cut us off from information,

suspecting (probably with good reason) that we are not to be trusted on matters relating to disarming the civilian population.

"The State Troopers are no longer eligible to receive arms and ammunition from the federal armories because Farnham says we've made a laughing-stock of Congress' efforts to control the prevalence of guns on the streets, so it looks like we're going to have to make-do with the two hundred thousand-or-so battle rifles we've already gotten from them.

"All of the military bases have widened their defensive perimeters to prevent what happened further south. That was a brilliant coup, by the way. Someday, I hope to hear how you managed to coordinate so many troops in so many places without a single leak. I think we probably won't get that chance now that the iron has cooled, so to speak. I'm wondering if I might consult with some of your military geniuses so they can help me figure out how to pull this off — if it comes to that."

"I'll ask the other governors and see what they say," Gloria suggested.

"That would be fine," Barry agreed. "Call me anytime with news. If they want a face-to-face, I'll come down for a meeting."

They offered each other their best wishes, then disconnected.

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In a tightly coordinated maneuver, troops crossed into Vermont from New York and New Hampshire. The troops crossing in from New Hampshire were, in fact, Massachusetts regiments pressed into service when New Hampshire's Guard declined the task, nearly causing apoplexy in The Oval Office.

Douglas Farnham was becoming used to having state National Guard officers refusing orders, and he was becoming used to not being able to force the issue, either.

Nevertheless, this 'pincer movement' designed to cut Vermont into northern and southern sections was about all the near-crippled federal government could muster. The block of western states had proven over the past year to be an 'Afghanistan with wheat fields': too big for a land invasion short of another D-Day, and the populace armed to the teeth. Reconquering it would mean going house-to-house with appalling losses on both sides. Farnham hadn't been able to find a general anywhere who would do the job at all, much less with a smile.

From White River Junction in the east to Fairhaven in the west, US route 4 became the divider between North Vermont and South Vermont. As the New York troops converged on the

Massachusetts troops, local militia assembled to get their assignments. In groups of eight or ten or twelve, sharpshooters moved overland toward Route 4 clad in camouflage clothing and carrying their most trusted equipment including a few items that were absolutely illegal for use in taking deer. For this kind of hunting, though, it was perfectly alright.

East of Rutland, Colonel Thomas Gwynne's *Cold River Raiders* found a weak spot. Two Humvees formed a roadblock to deter traffic from moving east or west on Route 4. Seven Massachusetts guardsmen sheltered between their vehicles, ready to challenge any who approached this checkpoint.

Gwynne pulled up a map of the area on his iPhone and quickly sketched the layout of the checkpoint including the seven guardsmen into the display. With a few strokes of a finger, he shipped the map to his patrol, all of whom carried their own iPhones, with a message of a single word: "bid".

In less than two minutes, he had responses back from seven of his snipers, each claiming ownership of one of the targets. Gwynne spoke into the boom microphone next to his ear: "shoot". In response, a long, extended 'boom' echoed back from the surrounding hills, and seven Massachusetts guardsmen fell dead or mortally wounded. The patrol swept down onto Route 4 and did a quick survey of the equipment in the Humvees. There was nothing worth taking. The guardsmen were armed with M-16s, 'poodle killers' the old-timers called them, and less lethal and reliable than anything the patrol was carrying. They all melted back into the undergrowth and headed east looking for other victims. When they emerged onto Route 4 four miles east of their last kill, they were short two men. Apparently, Massachusetts had its own snipers deployed, and they were good.

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Two men entered the pharmacy across from the Katonah (NY) train station. They both carried shotguns that they had until just seconds ago hidden under their long coats.

Before either had spoken so much as a word, the pharmacist-in-charge had kned the alarm button beneath the counter. Alarms rang in the nearest police station.

The first man to approach the counter tossed a canvas bag at the pharmacist. "Fill it from the cash register," he ordered, "and add all the oxycontin on the shelf," the gunman added, pointing at the oxycontin with the business-end of the shotgun.

The pharmacist did as he was instructed, quickly tossing all the paper money from the register and following it with two cartons of the narcotic. The gunman grabbed the bag and backed up two steps.

"Thanks," he told the pharmacist, then shot him in the upper torso. Three customers who were in the store at the time were also shot. All four either died at the scene or in the ambulances rushing them to nearby hospitals. The gunmen were long gone when the police arrived.

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Three men strolled into the Community Pharmacy on W 400th N in Orem, UT. To get the pharmacist's attention, one of them stitched six shots into the ceiling from his Mac-10, then tossed a bag onto the counter.

"Load it up, old man," the ringleader ordered while his accomplices held the customers and other staff at gunpoint. "All the money and all the drugs. Hurry up."

The pharmacist thumbed the silent alarm as he opened the cash register, and scooped bills from the drawer with his right hand while his left hand slipped a Ruger .357 Magnum from the holster Velcroed to the underside of the counter. "You want the coins, too?" he asked the robber.

"No. Fuck the coins. Get the drugs." With this, the gunman looked over his shoulder at his partners, and the pharmacist took this opportunity to shoot him in the head. The slug exited the other side of the gunman's skull in a shower of gore and smashed through two shelves before coming to rest.

His partners, now splashed with blood, bone fragments, and various liquids from the bottles broken in the path of the .357 slug, panicked and ran from the store onto W 400th N where they were met by three shopkeepers from other stores on the street. Those shopkeepers had either heard the shots from the Mac-10 or had seen the silent alarm on repeaters in their own stores and had responded to their neighbor's call for help. One of the panicky robbers raised his weapon, pointing it at the barber, and the other shopkeepers immediately shot both surviving robbers dead.

Inside, the pharmacist popped the tape from the video surveillance unit and replaced it with a spare. The police would want this tape 'just for the record', and he didn't want it to be accidentally over-written. Besides, it would make a great souvenir, not to mention a fine object-lesson for anyone else contemplating a life of crime.

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Governor David Cabot of Massachusetts monitored the action in Vermont from his office with the help of a half-dozen National Guard Majors and Captains detailed expressly for this purpose. They existed to explain in layman's terms what was happening at the front. They used layman's terms because David Cabot had never so much as held a rifle in his own hands and had no military experience whatsoever. He did, however, enjoy playing war.

His secretary entered the room where Cabot and the officers were examining a large wall display showing troop movements and battles currently raging. "Governor Constance Broadley is on the phone for you, Governor," she advised him.

"Broadley?" he asked. "From Montana?"

"Yes, sir," the secretary answered. "I think so."

"I wonder why she's calling me?" he muttered, then reached for his phone. Only a single button was blinking so he knew that had to be it. He switched the speaker on so that the military officers in the room could hear and pushed the blinking button. "Governor Cabot," he announced himself.

"David, this is Constance Broadley calling you from Helena, Montana," Broadley began. "I also have on this call the other twelve governors of the Constitutional Alliance. David, we're calling to urge you to withdraw the Massachusetts troops now waging war upon your neighbor, Vermont —"

"Now, wait just a moment, Governor Broadley," Cabot interrupted. "Vermont is in rebellion against the lawful authority of the United States exactly as all of you are. You have all been given enormous leeway despite your treasonous behavior, but you cannot really have believed you would be permitted to just pick up your marbles and walk away, can you? The United States will be whole once again. Vermont is merely the first of thirteen dominoes —"

Now it was Broadley's turn to interrupt: "David, you aren't going to make us repeat the lesson of Linden, are you? I have to warn you — please believe me — that the next lesson we issue will not be with a conventional warhead. If we are forced to fire on Massachusetts, Boston will be radioactive until men have forgotten why it was once important."

"You wouldn't dare —" Cabot gasped.

"Yes, David," Emerson Stenbridge answered him, "we would, and both you and we are running out of time."

Pete Shipwell added his opinion: "David, this is Pete Shipwell, Governor of Texas. We have agreed to give you six hours to withdraw your troops from Vermont. Understand: that's not 'six hours to begin withdrawing'. That's 'six hours to complete withdrawing'. If you

intend to miss that deadline, you need to start evacuating Boston right away."

Major Clark Featherstone put his hand on the Governor's shoulder as a way of silently warning him to hold his peace and leaned in to speak to the telephone: "Governor Shipwell, this is Major Featherstone, Massachusetts Guard. Sir, if we had begun withdrawing our troops two hours ago it is unlikely we could have them all beyond Vermont's borders six hours from now. Do I understand you correctly that you intend to nuke Boston when we miss your highly unrealistic deadline?"

Emerson Stembridge, nearly sputtering upon hearing this, butted back in to the conversation. "Major Featherstone, Vermont is barely 40 miles wide as the crow flies at that point — maybe 60 miles by road. Are you telling me you can't move your troops out as fast as you moved them in? Are you telling us you can't move troops 30 miles in six hours? That's just five miles per hour! If that's true you should probably resign your commission. You're a failure."

Cabot brushed Featherstone aside. Stembridge had thoroughly discredited him. "Gentlemen, ladies," Cabot riposted, "I presume you realize a nuclear attack will elicit a nuclear response? Are you sure you want to initiate a nuclear exchange with the Eastern States? Surely you understand you would lose that bet."

David," Constance Broadley answered him, "there is no one here who thinks a nuclear exchange would result in winners and losers. Yes, we all understand that there would be no winners in that scenario. There are none in the scenario you wish to play, either, David, and that's the point: you of the Eastern States *want* to live in a world where fundamental liberty exists at the whim of the majority, and thus does not exist at all. If we're going to lose — if you're going to force us back into slavery — then let us at least offer the world an object lesson in how high the price can be bid up."

"That's rather cold, Constance," Cabot responded, at last using her familiar name. "You would be destroying... murdering many innocent civilians. Have you descended to that level of barbarity?"

Emerson Stembridge snapped back at him: "Isn't that what your troops are doing right now in Vermont? Vermont has no army other than the Vermont Guard. Your troops are mostly fighting against civilians who are defending their families, their homes, and their communities."

"Then they're 'unlawful enemy combatants', Governor Stembridge," Cabot responded coldly. "When they cease their rebellion, no more civilians will be harmed."

"Ah, 'the Bush Doctrine'," Gloria Talamanco interjected. "*We're either with you or against you*, eh? Noted. However, we much

prefer 'the Clinton Doctrine'." Cabot could almost see her smirk from the tone of her reply. "*Those who enable aggression are responsible for it.* In that sense, the people of Boston are not innocent civilians but rather legitimate targets. You have made them so, and you are fast running out of time to save them. Make your decision."

Before Cabot could reply, Governor Joseph Smith Slaney of Utah stuck his foot in the conversational door: "David, there's no need for this dispute to come to physical force. Let me explain. You obviously believe that the system of government of which you are a part is far superior to that which we have chosen. Is that a fair assumption?"

"Yes, that's fair," Cabot replied, as yet somewhat unsure of who had asked the question.

"Well, then," Slaney continued, "it's only a matter of time before we rebellious states are back knocking on your door, begging to be re-admitted to the Union. Isn't that what you would fully expect?"

"Well... yes, but —" Cabot couldn't quite find the words to say what he was thinking.

"'But' what?" Buddy Tyler prompted. "But what if they succeed? But what if other states leave the Union to join them? But what if this causes the Union to collapse?"

"Yes," Cabot replied, "all of those."

This was exactly what Slaney had hoped for: Cabot admitting that he really didn't believe his system was 'far superior'. "In other words," Slaney tugged the line to set the hook, "'what if the Union is shown to be a *less* desirable alternative?' That's why we rebellious states must be brought back into the fold by force, isn't it? You can't afford to have us demonstrate that there's a better way to run this railroad, can you? David, that's morally reprehensible. You should be ashamed."

There was a long pause from Cabot's end of the line. Pete Shipwell took the opportunity to interject: "Six hours, Governor Cabot. That's all the time you've got left. Use it well."

There was a 'click' as Shipwell disconnected followed by twelve more to end the call.

Cabot sat at the Governor's desk staring at a spot on the far wall of the room. Major Featherstone began: "Governor —" but Cabot showed him the back of his hand to silence him. More minutes passed before Cabot's thoughts finally jelled.

"Major," Cabot ordered without taking his eyes off that same spot on the far wall, "order our troops to evacuate from Vermont by the most expeditious route available."

Two miles from the border with New York, at a place where a finger of Lake Bomoseen requires a bridge for US route 4, a line of trucks filled with New York Guardsmen came to a halt at a hastily constructed roadblock. A large sign in front said: "No vehicles, firearms, or artillery beyond this point", and a single Vermont militiaman armed only with a rifle stood behind the barricade. The lead truck slowed to a stop, and an officer stepped down from its passenger seat. The militiaman approached him.

"You'll have to walk from here, Captain," the militiaman called to the officer.

"Or I can just have these trucks plow through this piece-of-shit barricade and roll over you," the Captain suggested.

"Up to you," the militiaman shrugged his shoulders. "You can all walk into New York alive, or the survivors can drive there."

The Captain looked around at the countryside. There were only woodlands on either side, but fully 80 percent of his troops were either on the bridge or on its far side. A couple of well-placed rockets and the bridge would become a cork in the bottleneck. This was a bad place to have a firefight, if there were such a thing as a 'good place'.

"You know, you're dead if there's any shooting," the Captain told the militiaman who certainly wasn't old enough to vote.

"Ay-up," the boy replied, "that's why they asked for a volunteer. Besides, I'm the worst shot in my unit. The good ones are out there," and he waved his hand toward the woods.

The Captain took one more look around at the surrounding territory. Whoever was out there had had plenty of time to prepare for this, and they were probably familiar with the terrain as well. This was a losing proposition if ever he saw one.

Turning to his underlings, he ordered: "Dismount. Leave your weapons in the trucks. Pass the word."

He waited several minutes to see that the word had flowed down the line to the trucks still on the bridge. "Sergeant, let's take them home." He turned toward the west and began walking. The others followed.

19 - Free At Last

Ottawa

"My God, it looks like they pulled it off," Kirsten O'Dwyer muttered.

René Lalouche rubbed his chin and looked around at the room full of his closest advisers. "What now?" he asked rhetorically.

"I'd like to suggest something, Minister," Kirsten O'Dwyer began. Lalouche nodded in her direction to encourage her to do so.

"You recall, I have no doubt, what I said when all of this started: it doesn't matter whether there's one country south of us or fifty. If they aren't living in harmony, it's going to be bad for us. It's pretty obvious at this point that the *status quo* south of the border is not harmony, no matter how you might describe it.

"We don't care whether the breakaways actually break away or not. We care that they're fighting. We've tried diplomacy, and that didn't work. I'm not suggesting warfare. That must always be the last resort. There is, however, another option."

All the ministers had their attention focused on Kirsten. When Kirsten paused to make sure they were all paying attention, one of them interjected: "Between warfare and diplomacy?"

"Yes," she said, a smile creeping across her face. "Sanctions."

"On what grounds?" Edgar Gilchrist asked.

"On the grounds that this conflict endangers the peace and safety of the entire world," O'Dwyer responded with a look on her face that clearly asked '*couldn't you figure that out for yourself?*'

"Well," Gilchrist responded, "shouldn't that be something the United Nations handles?"

"Exactly, Mr. Gilchrist," she smiled. "We need to go before the General Assembly and ask them to sanction the United States — or what's left of it — for acting in such a dangerous manner."

Lalouche shook his head. "They'll never do that. For one thing, it would mean approving, even if only by implication, a regional right to secession. The U. N. has a long history of rejection of secessionist movements. And this is the least likely situation for them to change their minds.

"Secondly, the driving force behind this secession is a dispute over individual ownership of firearms. The U. N. has been trying for fifty years to snuff out any traces of non-governmental weaponry. I'm

sure I don't have to quote you chapter-and-verse, Kirsten, of all the anti-firearms policies overwhelmingly approved in the General Assembly.

"And, thirdly, the United States still holds a seat on the Security Council and can simply veto any proposal which does not meet with its approval. It's simply not in the realm of reality to expect they might not block sanctions levied against themselves."

"Actually, Prime Minister," Kirsten O'Dwyer asserted smugly, "I do think they will refrain from vetoing such a measure. If a member of the Security Council is seen as being able to flagrantly violate the organization's charter and fundamental principles, then either of two things become likely: one, the major funding sources, ourselves included, may conclude that the U. N. is a lost cause and withdraw, taking their — our — money with them; two, to forestall such a thing, the membership may require that the United States be removed from its permanent seat on the Security Council on the grounds that the United States no longer exists in the form it had when the seat was created. In either case, a veto will have little in the way of practical effect, since we will have the established precedent of being able to deviate wildly from our charter obligations exactly as our neighbor to the south has done."

Edgar Gilchrist laughed out loud. "I think she has you there, Prime Minister. Game, set, and match."

Praha, Czech Republic

"Are you sure you don't want to do this? We *are* in your own capital city, after all."

"Absolutely," Svoboda brushed him off. "Your English is much better than mine. Now, if we want to do this in Czech, then yes, but I think we made the right decision to make the announcement in English. Therefore, it's your job." Vaclav Svoboda, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, shook the hand of his counterpart from Slovakia, Vlad Rastislav, and they exited to the anteroom for this joint press conference. Strobes winked as photographers began shooting, each trying to capture 'the moment', whatever that might later turn out to be.

When the hall had finally quieted, Rastislav stepped to the lectern. "The Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were once a single nation," he began. "True, we were joined somewhat involuntarily by the Habsburgs, but it is also true that our peoples were much more alike than they were different. Nevertheless, we recognized the value of being able to each make our own way, and

while our countries have primarily followed parallel courses since the Velvet Divorce, it is that freedom to deviate from the other's course that has made us both stronger nations and stronger friends.

"Words fail us at times like these as we watch other collections of people — I'm referring, of course, to the situation in the United States — attempt to sort out their own relationships one to the other. Naturally, we wish for them the same sort of 'Velvet Divorce' by which the Czech people and the Slovak people parted company in 1993." He glanced over at Vaclav Svoboda who nodded in agreement, then Rastislav turned back to the microphones.

"We, the Czech and the Slovak, believe it is necessary to do all that we can to ease the transition toward independence for all freedom-loving people. Therefore, we today issue a joint communiqué on behalf of both of our governments, hand-in-hand, and both of our nations, acting as one, by formally recognizing the independence of the Constitutional Alliance and its constituent states." The air in the room turned brilliant as dozens of strobes competed with the sunlight streaming in through the windows.

"We have as well," he continued, "instructed our ambassadors to the United Nations to place before the General Assembly the issue of membership for this new nation, and we will soon approach the Constitutional Alliance to establish formal diplomatic ties.

"Prime Minister Svoboda and I admit that we have rushed this announcement somewhat in order to be the first to officially recognize a new nation, so there is nothing further we can say at this time. We will now entertain any questions you may have."

A figure rose to ask a question. "Gordon Tunbridge, BBC World News. From briefings we have had via our research staff, it appears to me that the so-called Constitutional Alliance has a body, but not a head. Whom will you approach with your offer of diplomatic relations, and where?"

"That is, indeed, a problem," Rastislav agreed. "Our staffs have in the recent past spoken with several of the governors, and you are fundamentally correct: they seem to make all major decisions by consensus. I, personally, see nothing wrong with that, but it does complicate matters when dealing nation-to-nation. Nevertheless, governing by consensus seems to be working for them, and for that we are very pleased."

Austin, Texas

Pete Shipwell entered his morning briefing with a cup of coffee that had just been handed him by his secretary. Everyone in the room turned toward him as he sauntered in. They were all smiling.

Shipwell noticed the smug grins on every upturned face and stopped. He looked down to make sure he had remembered to get dressed. *No problem there, he thought, and my fly isn't unzipped, either. What do they think is so funny?*

"Okay," he addressed them, "what's the joke?"

"The lead story on your morning briefing, Governor, is that we have just been formally recognized as an independent nation," his press secretary informed him, still not able to get the smile off her face.

"By who?" Shipwell asked. "When?"

"About four this morning, our time, by Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Jointly. They said (and I quote): 'We believe it is necessary to do all that we can to ease the transition toward independence for all freedom-loving people', unquote."

"That's outstanding!" Shipwell effused. "Did they also recognize the other states?"

"Well, that's something of a problem," the press secretary admitted. "They recognized 'The Constitutional Alliance and its constituent states', but not the individual states by name. It appears they may think of the thirteen of us as — collectively — a 'country'. I haven't tried to contact anyone about that. We were all waiting for you."

Shipwell turned to Joyce Crispin standing behind him. "Joyce, can we get in touch with the nearest Czech Embassy to establish a line of communication?"

Joyce handed him a telephone handset. "The nearest embassy is in Washington, DC, sir. Press 'TALK', and it will connect you there," she informed him. Shipwell smiled. *It's not possible to pay a good secretary what she's worth,* he thought. He pressed the 'TALK' button.

The call was picked up on the second ring. "Embassy of the Czech Republic, good morning, how may I direct your call?"

"*Dobry den,*" Shipwell began, "This is Governor Pete Shipwell of the Republic of Texas. If I may, I would like to speak to the Ambassador."

"Good morning, Governor Shipwell, *dobry den,*" the operator greeted him. "The Ambassador has not yet called for his morning messages, but I am certain he will wish to speak with you as soon as

he does. May I have the Ambassador return your call to the same number?"

"By all means," Shipwell agreed. "I will be waiting to hear from the Ambassador at his convenience."

It must have been that the embassy operator called the Ambassador's private secretary as soon as Shipwell had disconnected, and that secretary had alerted the Ambassador that Shipwell had called, because the Ambassador made Shipwell his first priority that morning.

"The switchboard operator said he greeted her with *dobry den*," the ambassador's secretary informed him. "He's either remarkably well-educated for an American or has a first-rate staff," she speculated. "Or both. Be careful."

"When have I ever been 'not careful'?" the ambassador snapped playfully. "Make the call."

When Joyce Crispin announced: "It's the Czech ambassador," Shipwell pushed the speaker button so both he and his staff could join the conversation.

"*Dobry den*, Your Excellency. I'm honored by your call," he began. "I have you on the speaker, and my cabinet is present."

"Do you speak Czech, Governor Shipwell?" the ambassador asked. "That would be very unusual for an American, I think."

"The only other phrase I know is '*na zdravi*,'" Shipwell admitted. "In Fayetteville, where I grew up, there was a substantial Czech population, but those are really the only Czech phrases I've ever needed until now."

"I called you today because I have just heard that the Czech Republic has recognized... well, to be honest, I'm not sure *what* it is they recognized. I was hoping you might interpret the press release issued today by your Prime Minister."

"I quite understand your confusion, Governor Shipwell," the ambassador started. "The communiqué I received in my morning dispatches mentions 'the Constitutional Alliance and its constituent states' so I presume from that that Texas is once again an independent nation, at least as far as the Czech Republic is concerned." Shipwell's cabinet and executive staff were all grinning so wide they almost looked like carnival caricatures. Several of them high-fived each other. "I suppose then," the ambassador continued, "that I should now refer to you also as 'Your Excellency'."

Shipwell blushed. "I think 'Governor Shipwell' is probably still appropriate, Mr. Ambassador. It is a long-standing tradition here to avoid such honorifics. We are, after all, still a republic and, therefore, the administration is the people. I'm even, I admit, a little

uncomfortable with the title 'Governor', but if I start calling myself 'First Citizen Shipwell' can the guillotine be far behind?"

The ambassador laughed out loud, and Shipwell laughed with him. "Really, Governor Shipwell, I did not realize the guillotine was part of Texas' culture."

"It isn't yet, Mr. Ambassador," Shipwell confirmed, "and I intend to keep it that way.

"May I inform the other Governors that they are now — more-or-less-officially — presidents of their nations?" Shipwell asked.

"Absent instructions to the contrary from Prague and Bratislava, Governor Shipwell, I presume that is the *status quo. Na zdravi.*"

While Shipwell was talking to the Czech ambassador, Italy recognized 'the Constitutional Alliance and its constituent states', the same language used by the Slovaks and the Czechs. Within the next hour, Venezuela followed suit and was echoed by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, all of Central America and Mexico.

In Ottawa, Kirsten O'Dwyer, hurrying down a corridor with her Prime Minister opined: "It was brilliant! This is better than sanctions! It doesn't require that we do anything beyond recognize reality. Really, Minister, we ought to jump on this bandwagon with the rest of South and Central America. When the United States is surrounded by nations which all — all of them! — recognize the dissolution of their former polity, they will have no choice but to make peace among themselves! Brilliant! I'm ashamed I didn't think of it myself."

"Don't trouble yourself, Kirsten," Lalouche comforted her, "it was never an option for Canada. Had you suggested it and I allowed it, two things would have happened essentially simultaneously: one, the '*pequistes*' would have risen up to declare Quebec's independence, and two, I would be removed as Prime Minister the very same day. You, by the way, would have found yourself summarily unemployed as a threat to Canadian security. Please, Kirsten, put such thoughts out of your head. You'll save both of us a great deal of heartache."

Kirsten O'Dwyer looked down at the floor and pursed her lips. *He was absolutely correct, she thought. As long as Quebec was the least bit interested in independence from Canada, even if they might immediately re-confederate — something not at all certain — it was not possible for Canada to recognize the United States' breakaways without also recognizing its own.*

Washington, DC

"What was it Oscar Wilde said?" Farnham muttered ruefully, "'A true friend stabs you in the front'? So, who's still waiting in line with their knife? Who hasn't recognized the breakaways?"

"The British Commonwealth, for one," Paul Armistead, Farnham's National Security Adviser, started. "Westminster seems to be leaning pretty heavily on the rest of the Commonwealth, and we're not entirely sure why. It may be because of their own colonial history, or it may be that Canada is worried about Quebec. We just don't know. Nobody in Ottawa or London is talking to us in terms we can rely upon.

"Jim McKinnon told me yesterday that he's near 100 percent sure Spain has demurred solely because of their Basque problem. France likely is flinching because of their long colonial past. They have a unique perspective on the 'judgment of history'. Portugal had long ago severed its colonial ties and has no baggage left in that regard, so I expect they may recognize shortly. The same scenario for Germany.

"So, the big boys — at least, the European big boys — are still with us, although for how long is anybody's guess.

"Everyone south of the Rio Grande, with a few minor exceptions has recognized the Constitutional Alliance. In Europe, there aren't but four countries on the far side of the Danube that have not recognized the Alliance. Every last country in Africa has recognized. Scandinavia has so far been sitting on their hands. The Baltic States, except Estonia, have all recognized the Alliance. Estonia hasn't simply because we have an overwhelming military presence there, and the government doesn't do anything without our permission. Absent that, they would already have recognized. In the Middle East, virtually all have recognized. China, Russia, and their client-states have not, for obvious reasons.

"In short, we're in the minority. If the breakaways are offered admission to the United Nations, the votes to admit them are certainly available. If they join the U.N., they will almost certainly join as individual states giving them 13 votes where we might expect them to have but one... not that it matters."

"Huh?" Farnham asked vacuously. "Why?"

"Because we still hold a permanent seat on the Security Council," Armistead explained, "and they don't. There's nothing they can do about that."

"Big deal," Farnham retorted. "Having joined the U.N., they will become 'member states' and thus subject to the protections of the charter which they will certainly invoke. Our efforts to recover that

lost territory will come to an end, not that they've been very effective so far. How in Hell have they managed to stay afloat this long?"

"The fact that they're a nuclear power helps," Armistead suggested. "The fact that they don't care who — among other nations — they get cozy with probably covers the balance. They have a solid trading relationship — based on oil — with Venezuela, and their territory contains nearly all the most spectacular scenery in the western part of the continent. They're sucking in foreign currency from tourists like there's no tomorrow. Their balance-of-payments is enviable compared to ours. Most of our funds-balance problems arise from the fact that we spend so much on military ops offshore. They're spending *zilch*: nothing offshore except to advertise how much money there is to be made by foreign investors starting operations in the Constitutional Alliance's backyard. The only thing their foreign policy is interested in is agitating for more trade. Shades of Calvin Coolidge."

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The first action by the newly-independent states of the Constitutional Alliance was to petition the IATA — the International Air Transport Association — to sanction the formerly-United States over their refusal to allow flights between their states and the breakaway states. The simple threat that The Golden Rule might be applied by all member-states of the IATA — cutting off air connections to and from the formerly-United States — was enough to cause the immediate lifting of the prohibition. Coast-to-coast air travel resumed almost overnight, although security procedures for people traveling into the Alliance were very much more stringent than for other destinations. It wasn't that the Alliance was afraid of saboteurs sneaking in so much as the United States wanting to discourage — in every possible way — air travel in that direction. Faced with the potential loss of revenue should this ploy become too effective, airlines began lobbying Congress to halt the harassment of their passengers, and the practice soon slacked off.

The second action — in their first appearance before the U.N. General Assembly — was to demand that citizens of the Constitutional Alliance held in involuntary servitude within the U.S. military — especially those serving in overseas' wars — be offered immediate repatriation. The ICRC — the Red Cross — offered to supervise the task of interviewing the nearly 90,000 Alliance citizens to determine which of them wished to be withdrawn from the active U.S. military and repatriated to their home states.

In the interim, until the ICRC could complete the survey, the United States Department of Defense was enjoined to defer

prosecution in forward areas of Alliance citizens who declined combat duty. This resolution the United States summarily vetoed, but it was widely understood that violating the General Assembly resolution would have severe repercussions via the International Criminal Court: it would become impossible for Farnham or any of his cabinet to do face-to-face diplomacy overseas without risking arrest in any of several foreign countries. Farnham grudgingly ordered his field commanders to — unofficially — comply.

Over the course of the next few months, the Red Cross, aided by Amnesty International and several other organizations, and working from rosters supplied by the individual states themselves, managed to have face-to-face contact with nearly all the troops whose home addresses were within the Alliance. Of these, nearly 35,000 declined repatriation, choosing instead to continue their tours of duty. The Alliance states had already made it a policy that no citizen would be refused their right to return whether they accepted or declined immediate repatriation, whether they continued to fight in U.S. uniform or not. So those who, for their own reasons, wanted to remain in the Armed Forces would not suffer any loss for it as long as they weren't fighting on 'the western front' as the border between the two factions was now unofficially known.

Losing 55,000 troops as with the wave of a magic wand was, almost literally, the last straw. Throughout the Middle East, where most of the losses happened, and many of the rest of the operational theaters, patrols in insurgent areas were now simply too small and too few. Field commanders reported back to the Pentagon that they were now engaged in a holding operation: they were content merely to avoid losing hard-won footage.

The response from the Pentagon was both predictable and logical: "We can no longer sustain the kind of campaign we have waged in times past," they told the President. "Losses will mount quickly and will overwhelm our ability to occupy insurgent areas. We must withdraw while we are still able to withdraw."

Farnham, facing reality at last, reluctantly agreed with his generals, and foreign campaigns began to shut down in ones and twos so that their troops could be repositioned as reinforcements to other, critical theaters.

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On Tuesday, Alaska declared its independence as 70,000 auxiliary state troopers — ordinary citizens sworn in 'to the service of the State of Alaska' in order to preserve their right to keep and bear arms — surrounded every U.S. military base within the state.

At Elmendorf Air Force Base, the Commandant invited the leader of the besieging force to enter the base for a conference. The several persons who might have been considered 'the leaders' quickly consulted among themselves to determine who would go inside to meet with the Commandant. Major Theo Brewerton of the Alaska State Police was chosen to be their delegate, and he was escorted inside the gates and conducted to the Commandant's office.

General Mark Stanford stood when the policeman entered his office. "Welcome to Elmendorf, Major," he said as he stretched out his hand in greeting. "Please have a seat."

Major Brewerton sat. "General Stanford, I must ask you to surrender this base to the State of Alaska. We are prepared to lay siege to the base until it falls," he informed the general.

"I'm hoping that won't be necessary," the general responded. "I am prepared to give you the physical base if we may depart in peace. How does that square with your goals?" he asked.

Major Brewerton was taken very much aback. He had not anticipated that Elmendorf would fall this easily. "And you will leave the aircraft?" Brewerton inquired.

"Uh, no," General Stanford responded with some hesitation. "My idea was that we would depart in our aircraft — as many of us as will fit — and leave the real estate behind, because we can't take it with us."

Brewerton was shocked, and it took a few moments for him to regain his composure. "I have to tell you, General Stanford, that we require the aircraft also be surrendered along with the base itself. We are prepared to destroy any of your aircraft that attempt to leave the base, along with all personnel aboard those aircraft."

Stanford smirked. "Even if those aircraft are filled with Alaskans?"

Brewerton's expression became very stern. "I urge you most strongly not to do that, sir," Brewerton started. "If we discover that an aircraft we have been forced to bring down contained Alaskan citizens, I most solemnly assure you that *none* of your troops will be taken prisoner. You will have 100 percent casualties."

Brewerton stood and turned toward the door. "We're done," he informed General Stanford.

"Not quite," Stanford informed him. "You're under arrest for treason against the United States of America. Two AP's who had been standing by moved closer to Brewerton and shackled him.

Brewerton turned to the AP On his left. "You understand, don't you, that by doing this, you are condemning every person on this base? When I don't return to report on the meeting with General Stanford, you will all be labeled 'not to be trusted'". He turned to the

AP on his right. "There will be no more meetings. None of you will be allowed to leave. None of you will be allowed to surrender."

The APs shrugged and escorted Brewerton from the room.

Of the 233 .50-caliber machine guns once legally in the hands of Alaska citizens (since 'donated' to the State of Alaska and now part of the State Police arsenal) 62 were positioned at various points around Elmendorf Air Force Base. So when three F-16s roared down runway 16 on their way to provide air support for the C-130s soon to follow, they were greeted by six streams of .50-caliber bullets. The armor on the F-16 is typically able to withstand the relatively puny .50 BMG round when fired at the fuselage of the aircraft, but the engines are a different matter. A single bullet of any caliber entering the precincts of the delicate and finely-balanced mechanism that drives the F-16 can do massive damage, and the Alaskans had plenty of ammunition. They weren't afraid of running out anytime soon. They, therefore, poured ammunition wantonly at the three fighters screaming toward them, and their generosity was rewarded.

Two of the aircraft seemed to rupture at the sides as their engines catastrophically disassembled themselves. The third aircraft had actually lifted from the runway, and its wheels were in the process of folding up into the fuselage when both of its engines quit. It sailed over the fence marking the boundary of the airfield and nosed-in onto the golf course at the south end of the base. The pilot managed to eject before impact, but was so close to the ground that the parachute on the ejection seat barely had time to deploy. Anchorage Fire Rescue retrieved the pilot by plowing through the fence at the south boundary onto the golf course and transported him to a local hospital for treatment of his injuries.

With no fighter cover, the C-130s dared not take off, and there were now two disabled F-16s blocking runway 16.

The remaining fighters made their way to runway 24, longer and more isolated from the fence line, and took to the air. Once airborne, they were much less vulnerable to attack from the ground. The insurgents on the ground were much more vulnerable, and the fighters began by strafing the fence line to clear them away.

The Alaskans scattered trying to find safety. There were hundreds of casualties among the besiegers. Apart from the three F-16s destroyed in the initial attack, all of Elmendorf's aircraft remained intact.

General Stanford ordered the base evacuated. Alaskans and others who wanted to stay behind were to be locked in isolation and rendered unable to interfere with the evacuation.

Washington State Air National Guard offered to send transport aircraft up to assist with the removal of troops and sensitive equipment. Oregon had undergone a change of administration during the past year after its Governor suffered a massive heart attack and died. The former Lieutenant Governor was unwilling to do anything that might worsen Oregon's relations with its neighbors to the east and therefore declined the 'opportunity' to help evacuate Elmendorf. California sent a few transports. The rest of the formerly-United States were unable to help since Canada had refused entry to their airspace for missions in support of the war to their south. They would, therefore, have to overfly the Alliance, a very hazardous mission. Too hazardous.

With the calendar edging toward Christmas, daylight started late and ended early. At least twelve hours of pitch black darkness allowed for extended night operations by the Alaskans. The fence line around Elmendorf was punctured in almost three dozen places and necessitated stepped-up patrols by the APs to minimize incursions. This cut deeply into the manpower available for marshalling equipment and loading the aircraft. The evacuation was going slowly. To complicate matters, the APs had rarely ever had to worry about a night-time patrol turning deadly. As a general rule, the primary role of an Elmendorf AP was to roust the teenagers who used the large unlit areas around the base as trysting places. Now several shots had been fired at patrols, and two APs had already been killed, one when a 20mm round had come through the front windshield of a Humvee. Night-time patrols were now routinely interrupted by gunfire with the occasional casualty followed, inevitably, by rushed reinforcements toward the weak spot followed, inevitably, by fresh outbreaks at the newly-created weak spots.

Midway through the second day of the siege, General Stanford abandoned Elmendorf to the Alaskans. A squadron of F-16s took off to provide air cover for an earlier patrol that now needed re-fueling. Two tanker aircraft, fully loaded, departed with them to take up a position offshore from which they could refuel the smaller aircraft and the last of the C-130s followed them within minutes.

Remaining behind was a nearly-fully-functional air force base save only that there were no functioning aircraft on the field. In the brig area, the besiegers found and released 82 Alaskan citizens including Major Brewerton.

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Friday, Hawaii seceded.

20 - Weighty Matters

Houston, Denver, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City all clamored for the honor of hosting the Constitutional Alliance's Constitutional convention. A committee of delegates from each of the now fifteen states of the Alliance met in Phoenix to consider the matter, and they were told they had one hundred hours — no more — to come to a conclusion. When the dog-and-pony shows ended, the delegations each cast a single vote for their choice. Las Vegas and Denver each got two votes. Houston got four. No one was more surprised than the Utah delegation when they learned the remaining seven votes had gone to Salt Lake City.

Salt Lake City, UT

The delegate from Texas rose to address the convention.

"Fellow delegates," he began, "I propose that this convention adopt as our starting point the existing Constitution of The United States absent all amendments and with the text appropriately adjusted to reflect the reality that this is *our* constitution.

"I propose further that we include an explicit power of the member states to secede from the Constitutional Alliance as and when any individual state deems that in their best interest."

Vermont seconded the proposal and the debate began.

"Well, you know this whole thing started because of an attempt to repeal the second amendment. Now you're saying our constitution won't even have a second amendment. Doesn't anyone find that the least bit odd?"

An Alaskan jumped up to be recognized and answer the objection. "That government had already shown it was prepared to infringe your right to keep and bear arms," she started. "They did it with the 1934 National Firearms Act. Yes, it was supposed to be a revenue bill but they always enforced it as if it were a gun control bill, even to the extent of incinerating the Branch Davidians and massacring the Terre Haute Irregulars. They did it with the 1968 Gun Control Act. By then they didn't even make a pretense that it wasn't about gun control. The history of the Constitutional Alliance and the minutes of this convention will make it clear that this government has no powers beyond those we, the people, grant, and we're not granting

them any power to control guns for public safety or any other purpose."

That seemed to satisfy the Mississippi delegate.

What about the Code of Federal Regulations, the CFR?", another inquired. "Are they in or out?"

"Since most of them would have been anti-constitutional under the old Constitution, as far as I'm concerned they're out," the Texan answered.

The vote was 15-0.

"Do we need a ten-mile-square 'seat of government'?" someone asked.

"I don't know whether we need a 'seat of government' at all," another remarked. "Why don't we rotate it from place-to-place? Have each state government host the federal government on a temporary basis while Congress is in session."

"That sounds like a horrible way to run a central government," a third piped in. "Foreign ambassadors won't know where to go to meet the national leaders. What about the staffers? They won't have a permanent place to call home."

"Holy cow!" the delegate from Nevada butted in. "If ambassadors are so stupid they and their staffs can't figure out where their next appointment is, maybe they shouldn't be ambassadors. Do we really want to deal with people like that?"

"No, what I mean is —" the earlier speaker started to retort but the Nevadan held up his hand and continued.

"As for bureaucrats not having a place to call 'home'... good! Most of the problems that led us to separate from our original government were the direct result of bureaucrats getting so ensconced that they were, for all practical purposes, running the government uncontrolled by the people for whom they were running the government! You say the bureaucrats will be uncomfortable with this arrangement? I wouldn't have it any other way! I can't imagine a better argument for doing it." He smiled broadly and sat down. The room erupted in applause.

By a vote of 12-3, it was decided to have no permanent seat of government at all.

The delegate from Hawaii rose. "The State of Hawaii requests that article 4, section 4 be adjusted to account for the recent restoration of our traditional monarchy. I am instructed to suggest that it is not necessary that the central government guarantee any particular form of government for a sovereign state. The individual states are clearly empowered to make such decisions for themselves."

There was a murmur of quiet conversation as delegations conferred among themselves over this most unusual request.

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The day Hawaii seceded the people declared the reestablishment of the monarchy with Lili'u Maka'apala, a 33-year-old assistant director of the Hawaiian Historical Society and a familial descendant in the line of Queen Lili'uokalani, their new queen. Four days later, without a shot being fired, 32 major U.S. Navy vessels departed Pearl Harbor forever leaving hundreds of smaller vessels behind, partly as a gift to the queen, but mostly because it wasn't worth risking them on a trans-Pacific voyage.

The Governor had called out the State Guard to put the rebellion down, but none of them would fire upon the largely-unarmed citizens marching through the streets carrying Hawaiian flags. In the end, the officers of the Guard advised the *haole* politicians who mostly populated the seat of government that their overthrow was likely, and many of them resigned for their own safety.

The government of Hawaii was then headed by the monarch, Queen Lili'u Maka'apala and her Prime Minister who had been chosen by the remnant of the existing Legislature. The new queen's first act was to suspend what was left of the legislature and reconstitute it as a unicameral Chamber of Deputies, one from each island or area with at least 10,000 inhabitants, and one extra for Oahu. The resulting 11-member Chamber served as advisers to the Iolani Palace and representatives of the people of the islands.

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"Is it Hawaii's intention to continue as a monarchy?" one of the delegates asked.

"It is Hawaii's intention to follow the will of its people," the delegate from Hawaii responded. "Isn't that true for all of us?"

"You misunderstand," the first retorted. "I'm just wondering whether this will 'clunk up' the final document if we have to write, for instance, '*...by the Governor (or in Hawaii, the monarch)...*'. Do you see what I mean?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," the Hawaiian answered, "I see what you're driving at. Why not, in that case, simply write '*...by the head of the state government...*'? That should cover all eventualities, even some we may not have thought of yet."

Article 4, section 4 was adjusted to remove the guarantee of a republican form of government.

Montana's delegate rose and spoke: "Article 2, section 9 contains many elements worthy of refinement. Specifically, the first

paragraph dealing with the importation of slaves is no longer needed and I suggest it be replaced with the following:

"Congress may not exempt itself or its agents from compliance, in whole or in part, with any Federal law or regulation."

"Perhaps in this way we may make any future Congress more sensitive to the effects of the laws it passes.

"In addition, the current lax language regarding the Great Writ probably ought to be strengthened. I suggest that paragraph three is better shortened to: *'The privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended'*, and avoid any argument regarding whether and when."

That passed without more than a few moments' discussion. No one wanted to be in the position of reserving privileges to Congress after seceding over the issue of 'to whom do rights actually belong?'

"Speaking of things-legal, has anyone noticed there's no provision for an Attorney General?" another delegate asked. "Someone needs to be in charge of prosecuting treason... not that any of us would ever be in danger." A ripple of quiet laughter swept through the hall. "So I move that we insert an article to authorize —"

"The President is head of the Executive Branch," a third delegate interrupted. "As such, there's implicit authority to hire the staff needed to carry out the functions of the office, including legal work, isn't there?"

The chairman rapped the gavel several times. "Guys and gals," he implored them, "for pete's sake, let the delegate make the motion before you jump on him. The order is motion-second-discussion-vote, okay?" The room quieted immediately. "Alright, Gabe, you have the floor. Make your motion."

"I move we insert explicit authority for the President to hire an Attorney General and the staff of the Justice Department." He sat down.

"Hawaii seconds the motion for the purpose of discussion only."

The Idaho delegate rose again, this time waiting for recognition from the chairman first. "I repeat: the President is head of the Executive Branch. As such, there's implicit authority to hire the staff needed to carry out the functions of the office, including legal work. I don't believe we have to make that explicit."

"Okay," the original delegate agreed, "but it makes 'paying for them' somewhat optional, doesn't it? Then again, if the President has all that implied authority, what's to prevent a president hiring armies of bureaucrats? Are we on the hook for anyone the President hires?"

"We're 'on the hook' for everything," the Nevada delegate answered, launching himself into the discussion. "The whole budget is subject to Congressional oversight. The size of the Justice Department, whether it's one employee or one thousand employees, is constrained by how big the budget is."

Everyone seemed satisfied with that, and the original suggestion withered on the vine.

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The delegate from Oklahoma stood when recognized.

"My fellow delegates," he began, "much of the mischief wrought by the United States Congress which drove us to leave the Union was precipitated by a misconception, either deliberate or merely mistaken, of the meaning of the 'general welfare' clause. The bulk of what Congress has done for the past century has been justified primarily on the basis of 'general welfare'. That is a complete misreading of the Preamble. James Madison put it this way:

'With respect to the words general welfare, I have always regarded them as qualified by the detail of powers connected with them. To take them in a literal and unlimited sense would be a metamorphosis of the Constitution into a character which there is a host of proofs was not contemplated by its creators.'

"That is: article one, section eight enumerates all the ways Congress may legislate for the general welfare. Anything beyond those is 'not contemplated by its creators' and is, therefore, anti-Constitutional. I move, then, to retitle section eight as 'Powers of Congress in Furtherance of the General Welfare'."

The delegate from Arizona seconded. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

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"While we're at it," The Wyoming delegate intoned, "there's some misconception regarding the regulation of interstate commerce that I think we ought to clean up before we leave this area."

"Misconception?" Oklahoma queried. "What misconception is that?"

"The widely-held interpretation of 'regulate interstate commerce' is that the Federal Government gets complete legislative authority over anything that crosses a state line for purposes of commerce, and sometimes even if commerce is not contemplated,"

the Wyoming delegate explained. "That's nonsense. The verb 'regulate' used there is the same verb used in the Second Amendment. It doesn't mean 'control by legislation'. It means 'make uniform'. It's the same 'regulate' that names the regulator on a SCUBA tank, the device that gives you air at the right pressure whether you're two feet below the surface or two hundred. The 'regulating' the central government is supposed to do involves making sure states don't make back room deals with each other to the detriment of disfavored states.

"In addition, the current broad interpretation of Congress' power to regulate interstate commerce isn't logically supportable. It asks us to believe that article one, section eight of the Constitution lists seventeen specific things Congress is authorized to do — plus one other amounting to 'anything else you feel like doing'. That's ridiculous."

The chairman tapped the gavel a few times to get everyone's attention.

"Were you going to make a motion, or are you just expounding?" he asked.

"Mr. Chairman," the Wyoming delegate admitted, "I haven't quite found the words I think are needed here, and I was hoping someone more astute might have a suggestion. So, yes, I was expounding."

"Would anyone care to help out our brother from Wyoming by wordsmithing a motion for him to make?" the chairman asked.

"I would," a delegate from New Mexico rose to speak. "I suggest we simply drop that power. As it turned out, the founders had nothing to worry about, and the presence of those words has caused nothing but trouble. If the gentleman from Wyoming allows, New Mexico will move on behalf of Wyoming to remove 'regulation of commerce' from the powers of Congress entirely.

The Wyoming delegate nodded. The delegate from Hawaii rose. "Hawaii is pleased to second that motion," she offered.

It passed 13-2.

By the time everyone was finished cutting-and-pasting their new Constitution, it was beginning to look, one of them observed, vaguely like the Constitution of the Confederacy.

"Nothing wrong with that," a Texas delegate smirked.

Among the more unusual provisions of the new Constitution was a requirement that every bill to be voted on by Congress address a single subject with no unrelated amendments. Every bill was to begin with a citation of the relevant clause within the Constitution authorizing Congress to act on the matter. Every bill had to be short enough that it could be printed, double-spaced, single-sided, on no

more than three sheets of 8½x11" paper. This Constitution would not permit thousand-page monstrosities that Congressmen could later claim not to have had time to actually read.

21 - Economics 101

Representatives from 62 of the country's most prominent firearms manufacturers: Colt, Smith & Wesson, Beretta, Winchester, Remington, Barrett, and dozens of others, sat around the conference table, listening to the presentation.

"The long and the short of it is this:" the presenter finished up, "if you can find a market for it, you can manufacture it here. In fact, you can manufacture on spec without a market in sight. We take literally the injunction of your second amendment (which, by the way, doesn't exist in our constitution) that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed and, as a consequence, the right of the people to build, ship, and sell arms shall not be infringed, either.

"Of course, this does engender a small problem for some of you: you don't need a federal firearms license to operate here, but neither does anyone else. You should expect to be challenged by individual craftsmen working out of their garages and producing weapons — not simply firearms in the traditional sense — that two years ago we wouldn't have dreamed of.

"Your challenge will be to stay ahead of the curve. For those of you who decide to move some or all of your operations into the Alliance, be assured that your interests in patents — where those patents represent real innovation — will be protected in our courts."

A hand was raised, and the presenter paused to recognize the questioner.

"What do you mean by 'real innovation'?" the representative from Remington asked. "What sort of patents might not be protected in your courts?"

"I wish I could answer your question, Mr. Tidwell, but I am neither an engineer nor a patent attorney nor a judge," the presenter responded. "I will say that the US Patent Office has been traditionally very liberal in awarding patents. I'm sure everyone is familiar with a number of outrageous patents issued in conjunction with the 'Y2K' problem at the end of the last century where the Patent Office certified techniques already in wide use as belonging to the person or group that filed the paperwork as if they had, independently, invented those techniques. I would guess that there are some patents in the firearms area that are similarly outrageous for their lack of clear innovation. I think you should expect that any such will not be treated with much deference in our courts. I hope that answers your question satisfactorily."

"I don't believe any of us hold patents that might fit that description," Tidwell mused.

"Then I suspect you have nothing to worry about," the presenter assured him, then turned back to the whole audience.

"Another aspect of doing business in the Alliance," the presenter continued, "is that we levy no business income tax. Such taxes merely get echoed back into the retail price and become a tax on the ultimate purchasers. We do our taxing in the open.

"I mean to be absolutely up-front with all of you as to the differences — some of them major — that you will discover as you start businesses here in the Alliance. For one thing — and this may be the biggest thing — there are no corporations in the Alliance. We do not charter corporations — at all. You may arrange your business affairs in any manner you choose, but you will not have the protection of limited liability. If you screw up big-time, you will be sued big-time, and you will pay damages big-time. The fact that you're bankrupt as regards your capitalization — stockholders' equity — doesn't mean the rest of your wealth is safe.

"Now, I know some of you will look at that and decide not to base your business in the Alliance because of the resulting uncertainty. We of the Alliance will be disappointed with that decision, but we will wish you success regardless."

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Jules Delaval had never been so disgusted in all of his life. After spending four tours in Iraq and two more in other hot spots, he was looking forward to getting out of the Army and finally going home. He had no idea what he might be going home to, unfortunately. His wife had left him last year and had gone to live with her parents taking both of their children with her. He had fought the divorce, but not being able to be actively engaged in the effort (because he was ten thousand miles away) left his lawyer with a hopeless problem. It was a situation that anyone might have thought could not get worse. They would have been wrong. It had just gotten worse.

Jules had just been notified that he had been 'stop-lossed' once again. He was going to (involuntarily) get to do another tour of duty in Iraq. *So much for the 13th amendment*, he thought. He pushed the POWER button on his laptop and watched the screen glow to life. He started his e-mail program and began composing a note:

Dear friends,

It seems the only way for me to get out of the Army is for me to become Commander-in-Chief. I therefore announce my independent candidacy for President of the United States in the forthcoming election. If elected, I promise to bring every last soldier home from every foreign campaign that does not have a direct, immediate, positive effect on the security of the United States.

Lest anyone be unsure what this platform means to our commitments to our allies, let me be as clear as I can manage: Fuck those allies who somehow manage not to pull the weight the United States is expected, routinely, to pull. If this violates treaty obligations that are, curiously, not matched by reciprocal obligations on the part of those allies, I promise to pay those obligations all the attention our erstwhile allies pay them – that is, not much.

I further promise to spend the entirety of our Foreign Aid budget in such distraught areas as Appalachia and the so-called rust belt. I have always been taught that charity begins at home. When the least productive areas of our country are able to provide for others with their surplus, we as a nation will be ready to extend that same helping hand to other countries – not before.

If you believe this to be the path our country ought to be on, I urge you to forward this message to everyone similarly inclined. Form local committees to support my candidacy, and commit yourselves to a rebirth of liberty and a restoration of our national honor.

*Yours in liberty,
Jules Delaval*

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"Who the hell is this guy?" Farnham demanded of his campaign chairman. "His campaign is nothing but forwarded e-mails, but he's got a god-damned campaign office in every jerk-water Podunk town from Dixville Notch to San Diego, and there's at least one bank in

every one of those towns with a 'Delaval-for-President' campaign account. Has he managed to violate any FEC regs?"

"Violate them?" Jim "Porky" Tuchman laughed, "He's got three thousand disconnected campaigns all of whom have to have violated at least one of the FEC's regs. Why? You want me to start shutting them down?"

"Yes, you moron!" Farnham screamed at him. "Get the FEC to fine each of them the total amount in their campaign accounts. That will slow him down. How much money are we talking about?"

"I have no idea. There's no central reporting mechanism. Each of these campaigns is doing their own thing. It could be peanuts. It could be millions. There's no way to tell."

"Doesn't matter," Farnham muttered. "When they're flat broke they won't have the muscle to do anything but whine."

But when Tuchman went before the Federal Elections Commission, they were unhelpful. "Until Delaval files some sort of official document declaring his candidacy, he's not a candidate. He might be a scammer. He might be a con-man, but he's not a candidate and we can't touch him."

"He has declared his candidacy — in his e-mail. Here — read it for yourself: '...I therefore announce my independent candidacy for President of the United States in the forthcoming election.' What could be plainer?"

"Jim," the chairman pleaded, "an e-mail is not official. Would he be a candidate for Emperor of the Universe if he announced it via e-mail? He has to establish a campaign headquarters, name a campaign chairman and other campaign officials, and open at least one campaign bank account that is owned by the now-official campaign. He hasn't done any of that."

"Are you out of your mind?" Tuchman demanded. "He's got three thousand campaign accounts, maybe more."

The chairman of the FEC put his head in his hands. He didn't know how to get through to this bumbler. *Okay, maybe one more try.* "Jim, you are a campaign chairman. Don't you know how a campaign works?"

"No," Tuchman admitted. "I'm a tactics kinda' guy. I've got staff to deal with trivia."

"Well, this isn't trivia, Jim," the FEC chairman informed him with a clear note of exasperation in his voice. "This is the law: three thousand people or three thousand groups have opened three thousand bank accounts all named 'Delaval for President'. Do you know what that means, Jim?" Tuchman had a blank expression. The FEC chairman continued, not waiting for Tuchman to acknowledge that he had heard the question. "It means shit, Jim. It means three

thousand people or three thousand groups have opened three thousand bank accounts all named 'Delaval for President' and not one god-damned thing more. It is, at this point in history, merely an amazing coincidence."

"So you're not going to do anything." It was a statement more than a question.

"What would you like me to do, Jim? Hire some Mafia hit-men to kill off all the Delaval supporters? That would be no more illegal than what you're urging me to do. Bloodier, but not more illegal. If I were to start filing actions against these independent pseudo-campaigns, the lawsuits would look like a hurricane. We don't have enough lawyers in DOJ to handle them all. The papers would have a field-day.

"Go home. Wait for Delaval to form a campaign staff. Then we'll jump on him."

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"It's — uh — pretty enticing, isn't it?"

"'Enticing'... yeah, it's *that* alright," the Director of Marketing agreed. "At the moment our business is 100-percent military-and-police, and it's 70-percent smaller than it was when we could sell to the general public. If we move west into the Alliance, we'll still be able to supply that market on an export basis and we'll have the entire population of fifteen states added to our list of potential customers. There are no restrictions there as to what we may produce or to whom we sell. Enticing? That's putting it mildly."

"And the Department of Defense is going to react to that — how? — do you think?" The chairman of the board wore an expression some might have called 'a concerned smirk'.

"I imagine they're going to be very unhappy if we begin dismantling our equipment —"

The chairman interrupted. "I imagine they'll station sentries at every doorway to the production floor. They're not going to let us pack up and leave. If any of you were thinking along those lines, you'll need to start thinking along other, very different lines.

"No, we're not abandoning our operation here. We're going to continue running it — in 'stabilized mode' — and establish a wholly-owned subsidiary in the Alliance where all new development will happen.

"You are correct in the fundamental assumption: eventually we will migrate to the Alliance — if they survive — but we can't do it openly, and we can't do it quickly. Stealth will be our policy. Over the course of time, our top designers and fabricators will be transferred

into the Alliance — those who want to go — and will work for that subsidiary. I expect that over the course of time — five to eight years, I think should do it — virtually all of our critical assets, human and otherwise, will move west.

"What we leave behind will be more than paid for by the greater opportunity in the Alliance." He looked about the room. "Are we agreed?" They all nodded their heads.

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"I think we have a problem, General", his adjutant opined.

"I'm inclined to agree," the General offered. "What do you suggest we do?"

"Perhaps we could call a meeting — bring them all together in the same room and ask them."

"Set it up," the General ordered.

The Army had requested bids for a new battle rifle. Winchester, Remington, Colt, and Barrett were expected to be the front-runners in the final competition, but none of the four had bid on the project. Three much smaller manufacturers had turned in bids half-heartedly and fully expecting them not to be accepted.

The absence of bids by companies who might realistically have been expected to be able to complete the competition and the low-quality of the bids by the others had left the Army in something of a bind:

They could accept one of the bids from the smaller companies, but it was considered a near-certainty that the final product from them would be rejected, something that might kill, in an economic sense, the lucky bidder.

No. They had to find out why the Big Four had declined to bid. General Mulvaney had the most uncomfortable feeling that he already knew the answer.

When they were all assembled, the Big Four and eleven others, none of whom had bid on the proposal, General Mulvaney addressed them.

"Something very odd has happened," he began. "In years past, when the Army or Navy or the Marines would solicit bids for a new weapons system, there would be a rush of potential suppliers anxious to grab their share of the contract."

He paused for a long time to let his words sink in. "In May we solicited bids for a new tactical rifle to replace the M-4 and received exactly three responses. I won't say who responded, but I will tell you that none of the companies represented here today presented bids." The several participants exchanged surprised looks.

He paused again for a long time. "To say that the Army is worried would be overstating the case. We know that we will find — eventually — a supplier for what we need. I'm just stunned — and that's understating the case — that none of you thought it worth your while to present a bid. Just in case there's something wrong with the original solicitation, I wanted to have you all together where we might find out what went wrong on this one. Is there anyone here who would like to offer me some insight?" Mulvaney sat down.

Geoffrey Cloister, senior VP for Marketing with Remington, spoke without rising from his seat: "There's nothing wrong with the solicitation, General. Indeed, the process hasn't changed for as long as I've been dealing with the Pentagon, so if there were something architecturally wrong with it, we would have found out by now. No, it's a simple matter of 'Economics 101': your contracts are cost-plus, and I admit it's a very generous plus. Unfortunately, it's not generous enough."

Mulvaney had a semi-surprised look on his face. Cloister continued.

"The plus was always used to fund the marketing effort when we would later use the bulk of the newly-developed technology on the civilian version that would follow your first shipments by mere months — when they didn't beat the military version to market.

"Are you beginning to see the baseline problem, General?" Cloister asked. "We get to save all that plus as revenue, and in return, we abandon all the revenue from the civilian market... because there *isn't* any civilian market. We can't even sell the technology overseas because the Swiss are the only likely market worth entering, and they have a decided bias toward EU manufacturers.

"Do you know what Remington manufactures these days, General?" Cloister asked, rhetorically. Mulvaney already knew, and Cloister knew that he knew. "We manufacture toasters under sub-contract to Sunbeam. We manufacture toys under sub-contract with Mattel, but only the metal parts. We're trying to snag a contract to —" He suddenly realized he was in the presence of competitors. He looked around sheepishly and paused, then continued:

"The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act killed us as a manufacturer of firearms because we can't make enough on the military and police market to keep us viable. I'll be blunt with you, General, and I don't care if our competitors hear it either: we're just looking for the right buyer, and we're gone from the firearms business forever. There's no profit in it anymore. You've killed the goose that laid the golden egg. If you need a replacement for the M-4, I'm sure *Fabrique Nationale* will be glad to talk to you.

"Remington's not." Geoffrey Cloister looked around at the other members at the meeting. Some nodded in agreement. Some looked as though they couldn't believe what they had just heard.

"Colt neither," the Colt representative added.

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"What does this mean?" Farnham asked the Secretary of Defense. It was a rhetorical question. He asked it only to open the floor for discussion.

"Barrett, Colt, Remington, Winchester, Smith & Wesson, Beretta — a half-dozen others of significant size — all seem to have shut down manufacturing beyond some minimal operation keyed to supplying the military and police market. They can't survive on that alone. Look to see several of them shut down completely. That's what Jeff Cloister practically threatened at the manufacturers' roundtable last week.

"The ones who do stay in the market may raise their prices because of the imbalance in supply and demand. We saw that happen every time there was a supply crisis, so it's an easy prediction. As prices from domestic manufacturers rise, purchasing controls will kick in. Foreign manufacturers will begin to look very attractive, and you'd better believe they're licking their lips over the prospect of taking a nice, big bite out of the North American market. When — not 'if' — that happens, the big guys will fold and the only gun manufacturing left in this country will be zip guns."

"There's always been that," Farnham informed them.

"There's something else happening, too, Mr. President," Dan Grover butted into the conversation. "It appears the American people have drastically cut back their spending over the past several months. We would normally expect that a decrease in consumption would be matched by an increase in savings with all the corollary effects on interest rates and credit availability. That hasn't happened. The wealth is disappearing. We have no idea where it's going, but it's not winding up in the banks.

"That is: there's a leak in the economy. Normally in this sort of situation, Amers flow into bank deposits, banks find it easier to lend money — in fact they have to lend money in order to make revenue to pay dividends — and you see interest rates drop as a way of encouraging people and businesses to borrow and make capital improvements. Consumption is off, but demand deposits are not 'up' in anything like the amount they ought to be. It's possible people are stuffing their mattresses full of Amers, but if that's true what does it say for popular confidence in the long-term prospects for the

economy? If this trend doesn't resolve pretty soon it will become a critical problem."

"How can there be a leak in an economy?" Farnham asked incredulously.

"Possibly 'leak' was the wrong word," Dan Grover recovered. "It's not a leak in the sense that plumbing leaks. It's merely that the numbers don't seem to add up. An economy is like a water balloon: squeeze it here, and it bulges there. The net effect of what we're seeing is that the bulge isn't where we expect it to be. As cash disappears from circulation, the cash remaining increases in value. Deflation occurs—money becomes relatively more valuable and goods become easier to buy because the price of those goods decreases — appears to decrease — to compensate for the relatively-more-valuable cash. The falling prices makes everything look like it's on sale and people buy. The same thing would happen if the Mint were to go on a paper-money-burning spree, except that the Mint hasn't destroyed any money in anything like the quantities that would be required to make this phenomenon noticeable. The part that worries me, and that should worry you, is that people aren't buying despite the sale prices. Where's the money going?"

"Dan," Doug Farnham glared at him, "you're supposed to give me answers, not questions."

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In the western states a handful of new pharmaceutical manufacturing companies had sprung up virtually overnight. In the absence of an FDA to say which pharmaceuticals they were permitted to manufacture, and a DEA to make sure they did as they were told, they manufactured that which they could sell. When the eastern states refused to allow shipments of certain substances across the border into the Alliance, many of the manufacturers headquartered in the East simply negotiated licensing agreements — the next best thing — and western manufacturers, many of whom had not existed when the drugs they now produced were invented, took up the slack.

Along with conventional prescription and over-the-counter medications (all of which were now over-the-counter meds in the Alliance) some manufacturers also began producing substances that, in the eastern states, could not legally be produced at all.

Nobody manufactured synthetic marijuana. Why would they when anyone could grow their own in their backyard? There was, however, a small market for some of the harder drugs that were now available, if not exactly openly, at the neighborhood pharmacy.

It had begun to be noticed by the man on the street that there were two types of users where hard drugs were concerned: those who had the ability to manage their drug use and those who lacked the ability to manage their drug-abuse. As those harder drugs became available, the number of drug-overdose deaths at first spiked, then gradually declined. By the end of the seventh month, the death rate had leveled off at a point that made committed drug warriors flinch because that number was so high, but which the ER doctors observed was actually lower than they had seen in years past.

The market for various drugs had gradually shifted from the pusher selling his wares from the trunk of a car toward neighborhood pharmacies where an unknown customer might be refused service and where obviously intoxicated purchasers would definitely be refused service.

The pushers didn't like that. Their suppliers didn't like that. Their manufacturers, sometimes in foreign countries, didn't like that. There was, however, very little they could do about it without unacceptably high risks. Four pharmacists had been targeted by pushers or their colleagues up-line. Three had died in ambushes, and one of those lost his entire family when their car exploded. Everyone else by then was on high-alert, and the fourth target happened to have backup in the form of her husband and daughter.

That ambush didn't turn out as well as the ambushers wanted. Two ambushers survived, both badly wounded, and lived long enough to give up the names of their up-line contact. He, in turn, gave up his up-line contact (and all of his pushers) thanks to the absence of a fourth or fifth amendment. That 'contact' happened to be the sheriff of the neighboring county who, when confronted, took his own life thereby halting the investigation.

But drugs weren't the only products manufactured in the Alliance.

Those easterners who realized too late the value of firearms and who hadn't been able to purchase an 'unpapered' weapon before their window of opportunity closed had nevertheless managed to find the black market. And the black market had managed to make contact with independent gunsmiths on the other side of America's Iron Curtain in what some were now calling 'Free America'. And those independent gunsmiths managed to package refurbished guns of various makes and models with small supplies of the appropriate ammunition. Even though the price, after it had worked its way through many levels of middlemen, was inflated astronomically, the ultimate purchasers gladly forked over the required number of Amers which then found their way back into the hands of Alliance citizens.

What those guns were used for was clearly nobody's business but their owners. Suffice it to say that the crime rate had risen sharply in the eastern states since passage of The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act.

Most of those who had learned the lesson of history did not find this at all surprising having seen the same scenario play out in nearly identical fashion in the UK and Australia after they passed *their* 100 percent prohibition laws.

On the other hand, the scenario playing out in the eastern states did have a minor difference in the script: the police were finding many more than usual victims of gun violence already had records, sometimes long records, of criminal activity. That is: the normal ratio of dead criminals to dead non-criminals was no longer 'normal'. A dead criminal was, more often than not, found in close proximity to a now-discarded firearm completely devoid of fingerprints or other forensic evidence.

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Bill's phone rang, and he picked it up on the second ring. "Hello?"

"Hi," the caller began. "I bought some stuff from you a while back and I need a replacement. Are you still in business?"

"Depends," Bill parried. "What, specifically, are you looking to replace?"

"A 9mm kurz," the caller told him. "I had to leave the last one behind."

"Sorry, wrong number," Bill told him and hung up. None of his customers dealt with him via telephone. Or, more precisely, Bill didn't deal with any of his customers via telephone. Every one of them was recommended by word-of-mouth by someone Bill trusted implicitly and dealt with him face-to-face. Anyone trying to contact him by telephone was obviously up to no good — for Bill.

Less than twenty minutes later, the phone rang again. Bill answered it. "Hello?"

"They're on to you," a voice told him before the line went dead. This was not news to Bill who had already started to sequester much of the contraband he dealt with. Some of his guns were wrapped in freezer paper and marked as if they were cuts of meat, stacked neatly in his freezer. Others were taped carefully in nooks and crannies of the stove, the dishwasher, and the dryer. Metal appliances were the best places, he felt, to try to hide other pieces of metal.

When the knock on the door finally did come, Bill was as prepared as he thought possible. The police presented him with the

warrant, and he stood aside while they began searching. After four officers spent forty minutes examining everything they could think of and finding nothing that could be called a firearm, they thanked Bill for his cooperation and left.

Among his closest friends there was someone, he knew, who would be able to finger the person who had snitched. When the excitement died down, there would come a right time for correcting anti-social behavior.

22 - Unconventional Warfare

Sergeant Delaval entered Major Pardo's office when summoned, came to attention and saluted the Major. The major perfunctorily returned the salute.

"At ease, sergeant," he ordered and Delaval relaxed somewhat. "What's this I hear about you running for President?"

"That's correct, sir," Delaval replied.

"Are you out of your mind, sergeant?" Pardo asked.

"Yes, sir, I probably am," Delaval answered. "I believe that qualifies me for immediate discharge, doesn't it, Major?"

"It does *not*," Pardo snapped. "What I want to know is how you intend to campaign for President when you're on patrol in Iraq, or are you expecting some special consideration because you're now in politics?"

Delaval snorted. "Major, the Army hasn't ever extended me any consideration for anything, and I don't expect it to suddenly start regardless of my being in politics. To be honest, I haven't given much thought to how I'm going to campaign from a Humvee. I suppose much of my campaigning will be done by proxy."

"You know you're casting the Army in a bad light by doing this, don't you?" Pardo demanded. "What happened to your loyalty to your unit?"

"My unit, Major, supports my candidacy one hundred percent," Delaval informed him. "I'd be disloyal to my unit if I were to back off my candidacy. But if the Army thinks I'm a bad influence they can always discharge me — honorably, of course — and be rid of my bad influence once and for all. If I'm not such a bad influence that I get discharged for it, I can't see that the Army has much room to gripe."

"Well, the Army holds a different view, Sergeant Delaval," Pardo informed him, "and I'm ordering you to stop this nonsensical campaign on the grounds that it impairs the good order of your unit. That's final, sergeant."

"Major, I'm not giving up my campaign for President," Delaval told the officer, "and that's final."

"Do I understand you correctly, sergeant?" Pardo asked acidly. "Are you refusing a direct order?"

"You don't have the authority to issue such an order, Major," Delaval responded sternly. "As such it isn't a real order, and it isn't an order I am required to follow. I do, however, look forward to the court-martial, if the Major is foolish enough to force the issue. If you

think my candidacy casts a poor light on the Army, just wait until my trial starts. If the Major has nothing further —"

"Dismissed, sergeant."

Delaval saluted, turned, and left the office. Arriving back at his quarters, he powered on his laptop and began composing an email, this one to Jack Tomlinson, who had volunteered to be his campaign chairman — as soon as he figured out what that entailed.

Dear Jack,

I've just been ordered to drop my bid for the Presidency by Major Hank Pardo, our unit commander. Of course, I refused, and he came very close to threatening me with arrest and trial for insubordination. I called his bluff, I think, and I suspect nothing permanent will happen. Off the record: Pardo's a jellyfish, and when I'm his Commander-in-Chief, his career goes in the crapper.

It also looks like I'm not going to be discharged and will have to campaign from here through you and other volunteers by proxy. It will be an interesting campaign.

What have you learned about the legal niceties of campaigning so far? I hear that we have a substantial war chest despite the fact that up to now the campaign hasn't been anything but people forwarding emails to others they know.

I'll try to get some pictures to you later in the week. I guess we can spread them via email, too, and keep printing expenses down. Let me know if there's anything you need from my end.

Jules

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Jack Tomlinson had made it the first order of business (after Jules had accepted him as his campaign manager) to collect a knowledgeable staff. His email to the distribution list asked whether anyone there had experience with campaign finance laws. In response he had gotten back about twenty notes from people he thought qualified including two former Libertarian Party campaign chairmen

and three Reform Party campaign chairmen or staffers. He immediately put them on a restricted-distribution list and began floating ideas to them.

Several of those qualified people were retired and indicated they were in a position to make advising state campaigns their new full-time job. In that way, Jack hoped, he could keep the various movements that seemed to have sprung up like mushrooms from running afoul of some very complex rules. In fact, those rules were so byzantine they seemed to have been designed specifically to make it hard for grass-roots campaigns to stay on the right side of the law. And the penalties for violating these rules were so severe that they formed the political equivalent of a mine field: one wrong move...

His new national campaign treasurer, Doris Mudd, quickly established a working relationship with about ninety percent of the originally-autonomous spontaneous state campaigns. Porky Tuchman had been almost dead-on when he told President Farnham there were three thousand Delaval campaign accounts. Doris Mudd had numbers from more than 2700 of them, and the good news was that Jules Delaval had, by her estimation, just shy of eleven million dollars on nothing more than an email to no one in particular.

If they could get him on the campaign trail, they would bump that by two more digits.

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Rolling through Mosul, Delaval's patrol was on high alert for ambushes. After all, they had the next President of the United States with them, or so they said. One or two of them suspected they were deliberately being given the high-risk assignments because the Army was ticked off at Delaval. Rather than put Delaval into a low-risk rear-echelon assignment, he and his crew were pulling the same daily patrols that were common for hundreds of other units in the theater.

In the Army's view, this was a win-win situation: If Delaval were killed, it would show that the Army doesn't play favorites, even with a potential presidential candidate. If Delaval quit to pursue his political ambitions, that action alone might kill those same ambitions. If Delaval somehow survived all the crappy assignments he was drawing and went on to be a political success, recruiting would get a massive shot in the arm: look, even a sergeant in the U. S. Army can make it big-time!

Pardo's superiors trampled the suggestion that Delaval be court-martialed for his actions. Everyone except Pardo saw the risks in making Delaval a virtual martyr. It might even be that the dishonorable discharge Pardo had planned for Delaval could make him

an even *stronger* candidate, and what would they all do if, God forbid, Delaval won?

The first video from Delaval to his supporters became an immediate hit on YouTube. The American people seemed to be particularly charmed by the idea of a front-line soldier running for the Presidency.

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The screen brightened to show Sgt. Jules Delaval standing in front of his platoon.

"Hello from Iraq," Delaval began the video.

"I'm Sgt. Jules Delaval, and I'm running for President of the United States of America." Behind him a half-dozen of his buddies waved at the camera. *"I come to you today to ask you to support the troops stationed in foreign lands. Some of you may think your support will not amount to much, but I want to personally assure you that each and every one of you is special."*

"The cards and letters, the socks and underwear, the books and DVDs, your prayers, and the cookies and cakes you send to the guys and gals fighting in physically grueling, psychologically grinding conditions here and elsewhere mean more to them than you know. They want you to know how much they appreciate all the things you do both physically and spiritually to help them with their daily duties."

"But there's more that you can do, and it doesn't cost a penny, and it only takes a minute, and it will go a long way toward keeping your sons and daughters and your neighbors' sons and daughters safe from harm."

"Ask yourselves: what do we hope to accomplish with the hundreds of thousands of American GIs stationed here, there, and everywhere? If you come to the same conclusion I have — if you come to the same conclusion we have —" Behind him, two dozen soldiers gave the camera a 'thumbs up'. *"— then call your Representatives, call your Senators, call the President, and tell them 'I support our troops. I support getting them out of places where the risk to them is greater than the benefit to the nation' and tell them you won't support their next re-election campaign if they don't get moving."*

"I'm Sgt. Jules Delaval, U.S. Army, candidate for President of the United States, and I approve this message." The screen faded to black.

Doug Farnham's face was red with rage. "I want that son-of-a-bitch standing here in this office tomorrow!" he ranted.

"That's not a good idea, Doug," Porky Tuchman advised.

"Why the hell not?" Farnham blustered. "He's undermining the authority of his Commander-in-Chief. I think I have the right to know why he's so damned insubordinate, don't you?"

"Doug, I've already talked to his superior officers, and they all advise we leave this be," Tuchman soothed his President. "There's no way to keep it out of the news if Delaval shows up here for a chat with the President. When the newspapers start asking what happened, what will you tell them? That you ordered him to stop campaigning against you? Or maybe you can tell them that you wished him well in his campaign to unseat you. They'll believe that — not! Drop it, and that's an order from your campaign chairman."

"Alright," Farnham agreed, although it was plain he didn't like it. "What about his campaign? Is the FEC going to be able to do anything to slow him down? Any word on irregularities in his financing?"

"No," Porky admitted, "so far his people have managed to steer clear of all the problem areas. We do, however, now have some leverage given that he's an official candidate. They've started to publish their campaign numbers. It's small potatoes so far."

"So far," Farnham echoed.

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At the Watergate Office Complex in NW Washington DC, a small group of men and women met to discuss plans for the upcoming Libertarian Party Convention. The top of their agenda was an Army sergeant who had been making very libertarian noises since the moment he announced he was going to try to be his own boss.

"But is he a member of the party?" one asked. "I can't find any record of him, current or past."

"Why would we care?", another asked. "As long as he supports the party platform, even if it's only 'to a significant extent' he's eligible. Remember, there are no limits as to whom the delegates may nominate. They could nominate a Communist as long as that Communist signed on to the platform. That would be completely whack-o, but it's not impossible. Come to think of it, that may have happened once —"

The room erupted in laughter. That *hadn't* happened, the committee members knew, although they had come startlingly close on one occasion, and the internal friction that ensued from it had almost caused the party to dissolve. They wouldn't make that mistake again. Before an outlaw would again be permitted to make a name for himself within the party, the national committee would 'whisper' that

person out of existence. The question today was: *shall the whispering commence?*

"I think we need to vet this guy pretty thoroughly before we decide up or down," the Treasurer opined. "Dan, can you contact his campaign folks and maybe get a one-on-one interview... without 'handlers' present?"

Dan Lundeen, one of the Regional Chairmen, gave him a 'thumbs up'. "Done," Dan assured him.

When the meeting broke up, Dan Lundeen went to 'Delaval-for-President.com' and clicked on the 'Contact Us' button. A moment later, he was keying the number for their National Campaign Headquarters and silently congratulating them for having a very professional and easy-to-navigate webpage.

"Delaval for President, good afternoon, how may I direct your call?"

"Good afternoon. My name is Dan Lundeen, and I am a regional chairman for the Libertarian Party USA. I would like to speak with the national campaign chairman, if I may."

"Thank you for calling, Mr. Lundeen," the operator responded. "I'll transfer you to Mr. Tomlinson's office presently. Should you become disconnected, you may redial Mr. Tomlinson's secretary direct at 202-555-0904. Please hold while I transfer the call."

"Jack Tomlinson's office. This is Marsha. May I help you?"

Dan Lundeen was impressed. In a very short time, Delaval's national campaign staff had located and hired a very professional staff all of whom exuded confidence and a 'nothing-we-can't-do' attitude. That alone was going to work to Delaval's advantage. "Hi, Marsha," Dan began, "this is Dan Lundeen, regional chairman for the Libertarian Party USA. I was hoping to be able to speak to Jack Tomlinson about the campaign. I know he's very busy, but I thought we might put together a lunch or dinner meeting where we could exchange views at a very high bandwidth. Are you the person who might set something like that up?"

"I could do that, Mr. Lundeen, but I think Jack would want to set this appointment himself. If you hold just a moment, I'll connect you." The line went silent for a few seconds before Jack Tomlinson's voice came on the line:

"Mr. Lundeen, this is Jack Tomlinson, National Campaign Manager for Jules Delaval. It's a pleasure to speak with you. What can I do for you today?"

"Jack, the pleasure is all mine, and I wish you would call me 'Dan'," Lundeen began. "Rather than tie up your day, which I know must be very busy, I thought we might get together for lunch or dinner just to chat."

It was a lie, of course, and both men knew it, but politics is very much like a courtship ritual. One says what it is one is expected to say, and one says it on cue. If the truth occasionally suffers for it, it's merely part of the game.

"The sooner, the better," Tomlinson agreed. "I'm busy tonight, but tomorrow morning is possible," he suggested.

"Tomorrow morning, it is," Lundeen agreed. "Let me host breakfast at The Watergate. Eight-thirty?"

"Eight-thirty at The Watergate," Tomlinson confirmed. "I'll see you tomorrow morning." They disconnected.

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At 8:32, Jack Tomlinson, who appeared to Dan Lundeen to be in his forties, came through the revolving door into the Watergate lobby followed by two twenty-something women. Dan Lundeen approached the trio with an outstretched hand. "Jack?" he inquired.

Tomlinson reached out to grip Dan's hand. "Glad to meet you, Dan," he responded. "I've brought along two of the campaign's interns. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," Lundeen assured him. He turned and led the way toward one of the complex's several restaurants.

"So, how's the campaign going?" Dan asked after they were all, Tomlinson and his interns and five others from the LP, seated in a quiet corner.

"It's barely a campaign at this point, Dan," Tomlinson offered. "We've got a long way to go, calendar-wise, and a candidate who can't give us much in the way of face-time. To be blunt, it's a bitch."

"No chance of yanking him out so he can work on the campaign, I suppose?" Lundeen asked. Tomlinson shook his head.

"No. None at all. The Army is being very hard-nosed about it. One officer threatened him with a dishonorable discharge if he didn't straighten up and fly right —"

"You're kidding!" Lundeen interrupted.

"Nope," Tomlinson came back. "Not a bit."

"Well, then," Lundeen continued, "it appears we really do have to talk." Lundeen leaned in conspiratorially. "What would Jules say, do you think, about running as the LP's candidate?"

"I suspected that was going to be the main topic this morning," Tomlinson answered. "I sent a note to Jules asking him exactly that after I spoke with you yesterday. I don't have an answer yet. I also tried calling him on his cell phone, but I had to leave a message. He didn't pick up."

"My guess is that he'll be somewhat uncomfortable linking up with a minor party, and some of your platform planks are very hard to sell, but you already know that." Lundeen nodded and Tomlinson continued. "Jules is pretty fussy about his political bunkmates —"

"That's one of the things that drew us toward him," Lundeen interrupted.

"— but I'll tell you what we would appreciate: an endorsement. If Jules were to run as an independent candidate, officially unaffiliated with any particular political party but endorsed by several, he might have a decent chance. You, the Constitution Party, and an army of others field candidates for every Presidential election and what has been the result? Don't answer. I'll tell you. You wind up with one percent of the vote, or two, or three, and you make not so much as a dent in the two-party duopoly. I need you to consider joining forces with other like-minded groups."

"What?" Lundeen interjected sarcastically, "The Green Party? They're radical socialists. The Reform Party? They're effectively defunct. The Constitution Party looks a lot like the LP until you start examining their platform. They want to use the coercive power of government to implement what appears to be a very libertarian agenda — if you can call anything achieved through force 'libertarian' —"

"Listen to yourself!" Tomlinson took back the floor. "You've got a chance to accomplish something and you're refusing because it's not everything. Holy mackerel! Here's a candidate who will act more libertarian than any of the last twenty Presidents and that's not good enough? Think about this: if you get a partly-libertarian administration in power — a kinda'-libertarian administration — one of two things will happen: one, he'll screw the pooch so badly you won't be able to recruit party members without giving away toasters or, two, he'll pull the country up by its bootstraps, and you'll have the proof you always wanted that your policies, your platform, really can do good stuff for the country.

"But none of that happens unless you win. Look, you've tried the go-it-alone method since — when? — 1972? How's that working out for you? You pour your treasury into every campaign and your volunteers make payments-in-kind with blood, sweat, and tears. How many of those volunteers have you burnt out in all these years?"

"Lots of them," Dan Lundeen admitted, "but we'd be betraying the work they lavished on all those campaigns if we went against principle," he explained. "If after all these campaigns we sell out our principles for thirty pieces of silver —"

"You're not selling out, Dan," Tomlinson pleaded. "You're calling in reinforcements. The Greens, the Reformistas, the

Constitution Party, they'll all get behind a Delaval campaign because we're going to sell them on this one incontrovertible fact: in a Delaval administration, even if it's officially independent, they will all (and so will you) have more juice than you've ever had before.

"I spent all last night lying awake and thinking about this because I knew what you were going to propose this morning. All of your prior campaigns have been diluted because there were fifteen or twenty third-party candidates and everyone in the press knew none of them would ever amount to more than a fart in a hurricane, and that has been the story for every LP campaign since the party was founded. I'm not putting you down. That's the story for every third-party campaign for as long as I've been paying attention. Even Ross Perot back in the 90s couldn't pull it off with a hundred million dollars of his own money. *A hundred million dollars!* Has the LP ever had that kind of money?"

Lundeen shook his head. *No.*

"Your only hope," Tomlinson continued, "rests with finding a candidate acceptable to a broad swath of the populace — and your own party members — and then getting behind him and pushing with all your might. I think Jules Delaval is that guy. And I think you are beginning to see that, too."

"I'll have to run that past the National Committee," Lundeen said. "I'm not promising anything."

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Marsha Culligan, National Chair of the Constitution Party, welcomed her guests personally as they arrived, shaking their hands one by one as they entered through the front door. She knew each and every one of them by first name and greeted them as old friends: "Good evening, David," she looked into the eyes of David Willingham, National Chair of the Reform Party.

"Always mysterious, Marsha," he offered as he shook her hand. "You never pass up an opportunity to add drama, do you?"

"Never," she agreed with a twinkle in her eyes.

Inside, Willingham looked around the room and began to wonder what Marsha had prepared for the evening's 'entertainment'. He recognized several other national chairs of other parties and made a bee-line for one of them.

"Che, what's going on, do you think?" he asked Tina Guevara, the head of the Libertarian Party.

Tina whirled around ready to bite someone's head off, then saw who it was and softened... somewhat.

"David, I've asked you before not to call me that," she told him through gritted teeth. "If you don't stop, I'm going to pop you one," she warned him.

"Oh, no you won't," Willingham smirked. "You Libertarians don't condone throwing the first punch." He winked at her.

Tina's small fist came around in an arc and gently tapped the side of David Willingham's chin. "In your case," she sniffed, "I'll make an exception. As to what's going on, I'm leaving that to Marsha. My lips are sealed."

"Ah, so you do know something," he challenged.

"Something..." she agreed, "...maybe. Why don't you find two adjoining seats for us?" *You're going to need it*, she thought.

A few moments later, all the guests had arrived and been greeted, had been offered drinks and *hors d'oeuvres* and were milling about mixing. Marsha waved the catering staff out of her dining room that had been reconfigured theater-style. When only party national chairs were left she closed the dining room doors and turned back to her guests. Outside the dining room, the security detail set up a perimeter to keep anyone from getting within eaves-dropping distance.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats and let's begin," Marsha suggested. Tina Guevara slid into the seat next to David Willingham.

"What you are about to hear tonight," Marsha began, "may sound revolutionary. Indeed, it may be. I will ask you all — although I have no way to ensure compliance — to keep what you hear tonight in confidence until the time is right.

"If this sounds conspiratorial, that's because it is. For the background, I'm going to ask Tina Guevara to step up and address you. Tina?"

Tina Guevara rose and turned to face the group from her seat. David Willingham wore a startled expression.

"I'm sure you have all heard the name 'Jules Delaval'," she asserted with confidence. "He sounds... somewhat libertarian... he also sounds a little 'green'... and he sounds like a reformer. In fact, he sounds like he could be any one of us.

"Two weeks ago, the LP approached the Delaval campaign to find out if Delaval would be a plausible LP candidate in the next election. The answer, in case any of you are wondering, is 'no'."

"Why not?" Eugene "Green Gene" Connor, head of the Green Party, asked.

"The perfect question!" Tina exclaimed. "Let's hope I can give you the perfect answer."

"Delaval has his heart set on running an independent third-party campaign. Accepting the LP's nomination — or any party's nomination — is too constricting for him. Rather than carry the LP banner into battle, he asked us for a simple endorsement instead.

"The LP's national committee is going to try to sell that idea to our convention."

"Why would he do that?" Connor demanded. "That's stupid!"

Tina pursed her lips. "It wouldn't be stupid if he could also get your endorsement," she answered Connor, "and the Reform Party's endorsement," she looked at Willingham, "and the Constitution Party's endorsement, and endorsements from the rest of the smaller third parties.

"In fact, we think it's a pretty smart move, all things considered. The two major parties have dicked this country over for so long that the American people have started to notice, and their notice has taken the form that of all the parties in this country, it is we in this room who have had nothing to do with the destruction they've wrought. We, and we alone, can step up and say 'this wasn't our doing'. This is a tremendous advantage for all of *us* and a tremendous *dis*advantage for all of *them*." Several of them smiled.

"But it's only an advantage for us if we can win," Tina continued. "History has shown — pretty convincingly — that when we contend against each other, we lose. We have, this year, an opportunity to all pull together — gung ho! — to accomplish something that has not happened in over a century: the election of a non-major-party president. It is also an opportunity that none of us may see repeated.

"Jules Delaval will not be the candidate of the LP, but we may endorse him. He will also not be the Green candidate or the Reform candidate or the Constitution candidate, but he could be our candidate. If he is, our opposition has an historic challenge: one of them will renominate one of the most unpopular presidents in modern history or will reject a sitting president in favor of someone from the same administration. The other will nominate an old-line establishment war horse. Both of those choices work for us. We can do this.

"In fact, we must do this." She sat down.

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In July, the LP met in convention and, after several presidential hopefuls presented themselves as potential candidates and were rejected, the convention decided not to field a Presidential slate, but rather merely to endorse the independent candidacy of Sgt. Jules Delaval, U.S. Army.

The Reform Party caucused the month prior and opted to endorse Delaval, thereby putting some small amount of pressure on the others. Unable, at that point, to label Delaval's campaign 'a ploy', Delaval was brought home and mustered out of the regular army. By the time the LP endorsed him in July, Jules Delaval was getting daily coverage on all the major news outlets.

The Constitution Party convened in August and, after some bickering over his lack of 'purity', endorsed Delaval anyway.

The Green Party had caucused in the Spring and had then nominated one of their perennial favorites as their presidential candidate. On August 2nd, just before the opening of the Constitution Party convention, the Greens' candidate suffered a fatal stroke and the Party was called back into caucus. Having seen the Libertarian Party and the Reform Party both endorse Delaval in the interim, and suspecting the Constitution Party was about to do the same, the Greens gave in to the inevitable and endorsed Delaval.

With nowhere else to put their campaign money, the third-parties poured cash into the Delaval campaign, along with many disgruntled Democrats and Republicans. Flush with Amers, the Delaval campaign relentlessly hammered Farnham, who had been renominated by the Democrats after four ballots. The GOP did not, because of that, get less severe treatment. If anything, it was worse: the Delaval campaign used the slogan "*They could have stopped this*" against every incumbent Republican, despite not having a non-presidential candidate in opposition. The third-parties picked up the chant and used it against both major parties.

The major parties punched back. Calling their gnat-like opposition 'ineffective', 'outside the mainstream', and 'willing participants in treason', the mainstream press, long known to have been in the pockets of the major political parties, marginalized and otherwise ignored everyone but Republicans and Democrats. The third parties, as they had done before, turned to the World Wide Web to press their campaigns and did so with withering ferocity.

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Just days before the election, the Gallup poll showed Delaval with a slight lead over his opponents — very slight. Of course, a slight lead could turn into a landslide in the Electoral College if that slight lead were distributed evenly across the right states. On the evening before the election, the Harris poll got into detail and predicted nearly a dead heat for the popular vote. If Harris were accurate, this could be the first time in living memory that an election would be thrown into the House.

Election Day saw record turnouts in every precinct from coast-to-coast. Doug Farnham was shown casting his ballot early in the day at his home precinct in Massachusetts. Martin McMurdo, the GOP candidate, cast his ballot in Maryland. Jules Delaval was the first person in his Louisiana precinct to cast a ballot. Then each of the candidates tried to get some sleep. It was going to be a long night.

At 7 PM, polls in the East began closing, and the networks started calling states as having, according to their projections and exit polls, gone to Farnham, McMurdo, or Delaval, there being no other viable presidential candidates in the race. Campaign staffers had roused their candidates within the past few hours to get them ready for the inevitable calls from reporters.

To no one's surprise, Farnham had commanding leads in the District of Columbia, his home state of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New York. He was ahead of Delaval in West Virginia by the slimmest of margins, and Farnham cursed his bad luck that this was a three-way race. He was sure he could have bested Delaval there had it not been for McMurdo siphoning off votes. *As it was*, he thought, *he could easily lose West Virginia's five votes*. That worried him early in the evening as it appeared the race might not go as Harris had predicted. Five votes could spell the difference between victory and defeat.

McMurdo captured Connecticut's seven electoral votes and Maryland's ten (at least he had won his home state), along with both Carolinas for a total of forty in the East.

As the evening wore on, however, the networks began (reluctantly) calling several states for Delaval: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Virginia one by one fell to Delaval. When it became clear that New Jersey, long a solidly Democratic state, was sliding into Delaval's column, network news anchors put on their 'worried' faces. *"As Maine goes, so goes the nation"*, the old saw said, and at 9:30 PM, all the networks called Maine for Delaval.

When late-reporting West Virginia precincts had their numbers folded into the final state totals, Doug Farnham was beyond caring that he had won its five votes. As the Eastern states cleaned up, the probable electoral vote count stood at forty for McMurdo, fifty-nine for Farnham, and ninety-eight for Delaval. Jules Delaval had almost as many electoral votes as his two opponents combined.

When Ohio's polls closed, it was clear to everyone that McMurdo had added another twenty votes to his pile.

Louisiana, to no one's surprise, sent its nine votes to its favorite son, along with Arkansas, its neighbor to the north, and Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois and Indiana.

McMurdo and Delaval split the Dakotas, three and three, while, in very tight races, McMurdo took the breadbasket states: Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, squeaking past Delaval in Iowa and Farnham in the other two. Michigan and Minnesota went for Delaval, but just barely, along with Missouri. Wisconsin went heavily for McMurdo, with Farnham trailing and Delaval even further behind.

Farnham had collected exactly none of the Midwestern states, and as the evening wore on, the electoral vote totals stood at ninety-one for McMurdo, fifty-nine for Farnham, and two hundred five for Delaval.

With thirty-five states still left in the Union (such as it was), there were three hundred fifty-eight House seats and seventy Senate seats for a total electoral vote of four hundred twenty-eight. A candidate who collected two hundred fifteen votes would seal the presidency, and Jules Delaval began to feel very confident. If only Washington State in the West gave him its eleven votes, he would have two hundred sixteen.

At 10 PM Eastern time, polls in the three remaining western states, California, Oregon, and Washington, closed. Based on exit polling, all three networks had already called California for Farnham. His campaign of *"don't switch horses in mid-stream"* had resonated well with California voters, and the state had gone convincingly, if not overwhelmingly, for Farnham.

Within an hour, the final precincts began to be counted in the two remaining states, and Jules Delaval began a stream of invective, a remnant of his Army experience, that most of his staffers had not heard him use up to this point. Thankfully, there were no live microphones in the vicinity. Washington State had opted for McMurdo, and Oregon for Delaval. Oregon's seven electoral votes gave Delaval two hundred twelve, three shy of the number needed to keep the election out of the House of Representatives.

If the reported tallies were true, McMurdo appeared to have picked up eleven more electoral votes giving him a total of one hundred two. The addition of California's fifty-five electoral votes put Farnham in second place with one hundred fourteen.

The House of Representatives would get to choose the next President of the United States.

23 - A House Divided

On the first Monday after the second Wednesday of December following the election, the electors of thirty-five states met before a joint session of Congress to tally the votes for the candidates for President and Vice-president. It was a largely symbolic event.

While it was true that the electors were not required by law to cast their ballots in any particular way, it was expected that the vote that day would very closely parallel the results posited by the networks on Election Night, less than a month-and-a-half prior, and it did.

When the totals were announced, the joint session of Congress adjourned, and the House reconvened to choose the President, while the Senate reconvened to choose the Vice-president.

Of the thirty five delegations in the House of Representatives, seventeen had Republican majorities, sixteen had Democratic majorities, and two were equally proportioned. Independents added an additional element of uncertainty. None of the delegations presently included a substantial number of non-major-party representatives, although this would change in January when the new Congress convened. A little more than half of the incoming Congresspersons owed no allegiance to either of the traditional major parties for their victories. Georgia, alone among the states, would have neither a Republican nor a Democrat in its delegation, but five Greens, seven Libertarians, two Constitutionlists, and a Communist.

"Of course, we have a choice," the senior House Republican explained. "We are not bound by the vote of the Electoral College, not in the slightest. We are perfectly within our rights to make McMurdo the next President. If we can talk one other state into voting with us, it's a done deal."

"There is a drawback to doing that, you know," one of the Congressmen noted. "When the new Congress is seated, McMurdo will not have a Republican majority — in either house — to enable him to accomplish anything. We could set him up, by doing this, as a totally ineffectual president. Are you sure you want to do that to him?"

"And the alternative is," another pointed out, "that we have no one in a position to veto any legislation these nut-jobs try to pass. There actually is an up-side to having McMurdo as a do-nothing president," he continued. "We used to be the party of 'smaller government'. Perhaps having McMurdo to veto the plans and schemes of the incoming crew will be just the thing to help us re-establish that

reputation. God knows, being Democrat-lite hasn't done anything wonderful for us."

On the Democrat side much back-slapping was being applied to the two evenly-balanced state delegations. The Democrats knew that they needed both of them to vote with the Democrats in order to secure another term for Farnham.

Few, if any, in the House were planning to vote for Delaval.

On the first ballot, all seventeen of the state delegations with Republican majorities voted for McMurdo, all sixteen of the state delegations with Democratic majorities voted for Farnham, and two delegations abstained, not having been able to reach a consensus. The House adjourned in order to give its members time to do some more arm-twisting.

There was a limit to how much arm-twisting could be done, since many of the Congressmen involved were lame-ducks, having been voted out of office the month prior. As of the end of January, they would be unable to pay back any legislative IOUs they might issue today, and those members who were to continue in office were unwilling to make deals for which there was no profit.

In any case, before much arm-twisting of any sort could be done the press exploded with indignation. How, they asked, could Jules Delaval get almost a majority of the available electoral votes in the general election and not a single one in the House of Representatives? Newspaper after newspaper spluttered and fussed that this was not what the American people expected of their elected representatives. The American people deserved better. The major media outlets: the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and others who were upset over Delaval's near-victory, and who would be well-pleased with a continuance of the status quo, simply noted that this was how the system was designed and that there was no use complaining.

The Web went crazier than the brick-and-mortar press. Within the hour, petitions were posted online, and people were signing them and forwarding them to Washington as a means to tell their Congressmen of their displeasure at this prostitution of the system for personal gain. Some petitions went online within minutes of the House vote, suggesting that they had been prepped and ready for just such an eventuality.

Of course, all such petitions either went straight to trash for lame-duck Congressmen, or received in return 'form letter 144' from all the others.

Dear constituent,

I appreciate your concern over the recent vote in the House. I want you to know that I have given the matter a great deal of thought, and I am especially mindful of the sensibilities of those I represent. I want you to know that I am confident I am acting in the best interests of the country and my district and in full accord with my conscience when voting on this matter.

When the nation is so deeply divided that no President is chosen in the general election, as happened this November, The Constitution places on each of your representatives the burden of choosing the best man for the office. I am certain my vote reflected well on this solemn duty.

The Delaval campaign began contacting the soon-to-be-Congressmen who had ousted major-party opponents to try to get them to do some arm-twisting of their own.

"What do you expect me to do?" one of them, a Reform Party candidate from Maryland, asked. "Make him 'an offer he can't refuse'?"

"Something like that," the Delaval staffer confirmed. "Tell him his life will be hell if he —"

"Wait a second," the candidate interrupted. "I'm going to have to work hand-in-hand with this guy for the next two years, and you want me to start our relationship off by threatening him with unspecified harassment? Are you nuts?" He disconnected the call without waiting for an answer.

The soon-to-be-Congressmen might have felt some loyalty to Jules Delaval for lending them his coattails, but that loyalty didn't extend to risking their effectiveness in office. And many of them saw this request from the Delaval campaign to be exactly that: an invitation to ruin any chance at a working relationship they might cultivate with their senior colleagues. No. They would have welcomed a Delaval presidency — that was certain — but they would have to play the hand they were dealt, and it looked to most as though that hand didn't include a Delaval card.

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"I'll tell you what there won't be," the senior Delaval advisor offered, "there won't be an armed march on Washington. I suspect it

won't be too long before the American people — that is, the Eastern states — gain a fresh, new understanding of the reasons for the Second Amendment. They are just about now coming to understand that 'petitioning for a redress of grievances' has an entirely different tenor when there isn't a shotgun in the closet.

"There are also a fair few of them, I bet, who are digging out a copy of the Constitution and reading it 'for comprehension', probably for the first time."

Jules Delaval nodded. "Right. They're saying *that's not how it's supposed to work* to themselves and then reading in the Constitution that this is exactly how it's supposed to work — or 'not work' as the case may be. And their sense of justice is outraged.

"Whatever. We need to come up with a plan to get people into the streets, making noise, raising hell over the House ignoring a clear... and unmistakable order from the people to the government. And we have to do it soon. The instant the House closes ranks and chooses a new president, the furor will die down and the debate will be over. We've got to prevent that happening. How?"

There was a long pause while the people in the room thought about the problem.

"Stars and Stripes," one of them finally blurted out.

"What do you mean?" the senior staffer asked, but a smile was already spreading across Delaval's face.

"That's a great idea," Delaval congratulated the blurter. "The military vote went for me almost eight-to-one if the demographics can be believed. The American people may be upset, but the coefficient of pistivity within the armed forces must be high enough that you can pick up a shovelful of it."

He turned to his chief-of-PR: "Prep a letter from me to Stars & Stripes suggesting that this action by the House is tantamount to them becoming domestic enemies of the Constitution against whom all armed forces personnel have sworn an oath to fight. If Congress is going to subvert the Constitution to ignore the clearly stated will of the people, should the armed forces support that? If even a substantial fraction of the forces now under arms take exception to this hijacking, the House will have no option, and that's the position we want them in: no option.

"Let's make this happen today. We might not have tomorrow."

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To the men and women of the armed forces of The United States:

From Sgt. Jules Delaval, U.S. Army(ret)

Of all my supporters, you have been the most consistent, and for that I thank you, and thank you again... and again. The bulk of the electoral votes we won in November were due in great measure to the overwhelming support I received from the men and women in uniform.

Your confidence in me and my platform, however, is not reflected by the Congress. You are probably aware that the House of Representatives is now engaged in selecting the next president due to none of the candidates receiving a clear majority of electoral votes.

Eighteen states last November gave us two hundred twelve electoral votes, just three shy of an outright win. The Constitution demands, in such cases, that the House of Representatives now chooses, one vote per state, which of the three of us shall become your next Commander-in-Chief.

In case you haven't heard, the first vote in the House was seventeen for McMurdo, sixteen for Farnham, and two abstentions. If this is a surprise for you – that the second- and third-place finishers got all the votes and the first-place finisher got none – then you may be wondering what's happening in Washington.

The answer is that the House is following the letter – but not the spirit – of the Constitution. They're allowed to do this, according to the strict literal interpretation of the text of the Constitution. It violates everyone's sense of justice and propriety, but it's not, strictly speaking, illegal.

Nevertheless, every honest person – every moral person – seeing this will instinctively know that this is not what the Framers intended.

And it's not what the American people intended

either. Something has gone very, very wrong in Washington. The Constitution is being subverted by those who see an opportunity for their own profit, the will of the people be damned. By their actions, they have placed themselves in opposition to the spirit of the Constitution, if not its letter. They are the domestic enemies of the Constitution mentioned in your oaths, the domestic enemies against whom we have all sworn to protect the Constitution.

You now have the obligation to determine for yourselves whether the actions of Congress have abrogated the implicit trust with which we the people endow them, and whether their actions have violated their oaths to the Constitution.

If you conclude, as I have, that Congress is no longer worthy of our respect for their offices, then you have a duty to act. I do not ask that you engage in armed revolt. What they have done may be dastardly, but it is not (yet) treason. Do you really have an obligation to support them in these actions?

I think that you do not. In fact, rewarding their bad behavior is exactly the wrong thing to do.

Please don't reward their bad behavior.

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Dear Congressman Platt,

Although I admit to having voted for Martin McMurdo, I recognize that the citizens of our great state of Missouri decided that Jules Delaval should be our next President, and I honor that decision. You should, too.

Whatever your reasons for casting Missouri's vote for McMurdo yesterday, I want to make sure you understand that your reasoning was wrong. You have an obligation to represent the will of Missourians. Voting for McMurdo, as much as I can sympathize with your motives, was not representing Missouri, but rather our party. That is not what we

sent you to Washington for.

The election is over. Delaval may not have won outright, but he has established a pre-eminent position among the candidates and he deserves your vote at the earliest possible opportunity and every opportunity thereafter.

*Dolores Parker
1104 Pasteur Blvd
Ofallon, MO 63368*

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The base commander's secretary buzzed in. "Sir, there is a large group of enlisted personnel here to speak with you." She sounded quite flustered and not at all sure of herself.

"Enlisted personnel?" he asked. "Where are their officers?"

"Sir, some of their officers are here as well," the secretary informed him. "They insist on speaking with you."

"Send them in." Just in case this was a mutiny, the Colonel slipped his service pistol from its drawer, racked a round into the chamber and deposited it into his lap.

A group of about thirty with a few officers among them tried to squeeze into the Colonel's office, but only about a dozen actually made it inside the door. The senior officer saluted the Colonel on their behalf and the Colonel returned the salute.

"What's this all about, Captain?" the Colonel demanded.

The Captain answered. "Sir, we, officers and enlisted men, have determined that if Congress — if the House of Representatives — throws the election to someone other than Jules Delaval, they will have become domestic enemies of the Constitution. At that point, it would violate our own oaths to continue serving that administration, and we will lay down our arms and resign from the service."

"This is about that 'Stars and Stripes' article today, isn't it? Well, I can't say that I blame you. I have already informed Corps that I, myself, will resign my commission —" A cheer went up from the soldiers in the anteroom. "— if the House so wantonly subverts the will of the people. In that, I'm with you — in spirit, only. You all had better realize that you — and I — will all end up in the brig if you do what you say you have resolved to do. But if you're committed to it, then you're probably on the side of the angels.

"Now get out of here and get back to your jobs. You're still in the Army, and you still have duties. Out!"

The Captain saluted. "Yes, sir!" Then they all filed out of the building and headed back to their daily tasks.

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The second vote in the House gave McMurdo seventeen votes, and Farnham sixteen votes, exactly as in the first vote, but this time Delaval picked up a vote from one of the evenly balanced state delegations. Congressmen were beginning to feel the heat, and were getting the message that betraying the electorate on this issue would not be forgotten by the next election.

CNN broke the story from one of its Pentagon sources that at bases all over the world soldiers and officers were threatening to go on strike, as one wag at the Pentagon put it, if Congress were to steal the election for either Farnham or McMurdo.

In Estonia, a CNN reporter interviewed a group of enlisted men at a bar off-base. In response to the question "How do you feel about all of this?" one sergeant turned toward the camera and remarked: "If this is how our government treats us, maybe we're fighting on the wrong side."

With over four hundred thousand troops at bases in dozens of hot spots, a defection, even if it were just 'failure to report for duty', by any substantial number of troops at any one of them could conceivably put an entire theater at risk. A shudder ran through the Representatives as they contemplated a mass defection of battle-hardened NCOs with their followings of young, agile, heavily-armed and well-trained tubes of concentrated testosterone. The Army was merely holding its own against the rag-tag Estonian insurgency. Give the insurgents modern weapons, enough ammunition, and soldiers trained in the enemy's tactics —

One by one, Congressmen had been calling whoever inside the Pentagon they considered to be a friend and put the question to them.

"Congressman Macy, all I can say for sure is that there are plenty of people here who are exhibiting bad cases of nerves. I don't know how serious the troops are about dropping out, but I know that the upper echelons seem to be worried. No, no one has actually said anything, and no one is scheduling press conferences. In fact, we are all under strict orders to DAK — 'deny all knowledge' — of any misgivings among the troops. Just between us, however, as one old friend to another, I'll tell you my opinion: this isn't sitting well with anyone in the E-ring."

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As the delegations filed into the House for the third day of deliberations and flopped into their seats, the Speaker rapped the House to order.

The head of the Delaware delegation rose to be recognized. "Madam Speaker, I suggest we begin by taking an initial vote to determine if any delegations have changed their positions." Michigan seconded.

"Discussion?" the Speaker asked rhetorically. When no one rose to the challenge, she ordered: "All for McMurdo, indicate." Eleven green lights lit up on the tally board.

"All for Farnham, indicate," she invited the Farnham supporters to signal their vote. Six more lights came on. There had been a murmur of conversation within the chamber, but it stopped suddenly as all in the room realized that between McMurdo and Farnham the votes cast were not a majority of states.

The Speaker wore an expression half worried and half startled. "Any others?" she inquired. There was no answer.

"All for Delaval, indicate," she announced. Eighteen more lights turned on. There was a long pause in which it was difficult even to tell if anyone were breathing, and then one delegate began to clap.

24 - Hail To The Chief

January 20th dawned with heavy overcast and a threat of snow. It gave the talking heads material to suggest this might be a bad omen for the new President.

President-elect Jules Delaval walked from his quarters to the inaugural grandstand accompanied only by his Secret Service escort. As the first single-by-virtue-of-being-divorced man to be elected to that office, he didn't feel the need to have his ex-wife walk alongside him, and his eldest child was just five years old. *If his 'ex' wasn't going to be invited to join him on his walk, she had informed him, the kids sure-as-hell wouldn't be there, either.* No matter. These things had a way of working themselves out. Jules was sure this one would, too.

Doug and Ellen Farnham put on their broadest, brightest smiles as they welcomed the next President onto the platform. In time, the Chief Justice duly administered the oath of office to the new Commander-in-Chief, and the crowd settled down for the inaugural address. Jules Delaval stepped to the microphone.

He glanced around the crowd. "It's cold up here," he began, "and we have work to do, so this may be a pretty short speech. Indeed, the commentators have labeled me 'a man of few words', and today I'm going to prove them correct.

"I have no illusion that there is any other reason for my being here today than that we, the people — and I include myself in that group — believe this nation to be in dire trouble. That you sent a sergeant here and neither a general officer nor a career politician speaks volumes of your concern. I have heard your order: *'handle it, sergeant'*, and I am anxious to get started." A ripple of applause worked its way through the crowd. "But you should know this: even though the President of the United States is considered the most powerful man in the world, even a President is going to need help. To be blunt, I'm going to need your help.

"Under our system, Congress has all the power. I know that sounds odd. Many of you think the President gets everything he wants. It isn't so unless there is a pliable Congress also ready to hear orders and follow them.

"The President doesn't give orders to Congress." Several Congressmen in the stands behind him grinned, basking in the new President's admission that it was they, after all, who were really in charge. "You, however," he pointed at the crowd and at the TV

cameras recording his every word and action, "can give orders to Congress. You," he repeated the gesture, "and you alone have the muscle to get Congress moving in the direction you want them moving.

"In the next few weeks, I'm going to be challenging this Congress to move in the indicated direction. It will be your job to give them the compass and the map. They won't believe me when I point, but they will believe you.

"Point. You know the way." Polite applause came from the crowd.

"We have soldiers in far-away places doing 'what' they have no idea. We cannot leave them in that state. Either we tell them what it is — really — they're doing there, or we get them out — bring them home." Some of the people in the crowd — most of them — applauded. Delaval continued: "We have an uneasy peace with fifteen of our sister states who were so distressed over the way we trampled their Constitution that they abandoned the security of union for the sake of liberty. We came within inches of a conflict that would have permanently scarred us... and them. They are now incomplete, and we are incomplete. Each of us knows that we have lost something precious, and I pray that, one day soon, we rediscover what it is we have lost." Thunderous applause broke out among the crowd.

Jules Delaval looked out across the sea of upturned faces and paused as if he were considering what to say next. The crowd waited expectantly.

"We have a long road ahead of us," he warned them. "You will have to lean on me just as I will have to lean on you. I will try not to be a burden, but I can't do this alone. There will be missteps, and we will gather more than our share of scrapes and cuts. We must not halt, and we must not falter. This is a journey we must all make together, and we must not lose sight of the goal because of the hazards we meet along the way. Let's get started," and he paused again for what seemed a very long time.

"God bless the Constitution of the United States of America," he said finally, and then Jules Delaval turned and stepped back from the microphones.

At three minutes thirty seconds, it was the second shortest inaugural address ever delivered.

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Delaval entered the Oval Office for his first official meeting as President. A few moments later, a quintet of Generals and Admirals filed in. Instinctively, Delaval rose and saluted, then sheepishly

dropped his hand and waited for the senior officer to salute him. "Too many years as a sergeant," he excused himself.

"No need to apologize, Mr. President," General Gates assured him. "It's a comfort to have one of our own at the reins, and I'm sure you'll get used to it soon enough."

"Yes," Delaval agreed. "Gentlemen, please be seated and let's get to work." The Joint Chiefs of Staff found chairs and made themselves comfortable. "You are all aware, I have no doubt, that I was elected on a platform calling for the end of most of our military presence overseas —"

"No one expects you to withdraw troops immediately, sir," Admiral Jeremy Talbot interrupted. "You have months, maybe years, to make good on that."

Delaval glared at him. "First, Admiral, I would prefer not to be interrupted while I am addressing my officers." Talbot wore a startled expression. Even Farnham had never spoken to him like that, and Farnham was a son of a bitch. "Second, I may have months or years to make good on my campaign promises, but our soldiers are getting killed, a dozen a day in each theater of operations, and they don't have months or years. In fact, someone's probably bleeding out as we speak, so let's not have any more talk of delay. That may sound like a suggestion to you, but it's not. If you have any doubts about your ability to carry out orders issuing from this office, I'll need your resignation the instant you discover those doubts." Delaval turned to the rest. "That actually applies to all of you," he told them with the sternest expression he could manage. "The American people sent me here to implement a radical agenda — one very much at variance with previous agendas you may have been tasked with. They sent a sergeant because we get things done. If any of you gave one of your sergeants a task, and it didn't get done, you'd have his head on a platter. Well, I'm the peoples' sergeant, and you're my sergeants. If any of you can't *git'r done*, I need you to get out of the way so I can find someone who's up to the task. Any questions?"

Talbot looked around the room for support, and finding none, turned back to Delaval. "No, sir, no questions."

"Good," Delaval muttered. "Now, you have plans ready for the rapid withdrawal of troops theater-by-theater?" he asked, expecting General Gates, at least, to reply in the affirmative. Instead, they all looked at him with shocked or dumbfounded expressions.

"Well, sir, actually, no," Gates responded. "We have several forms of plan for increasing troop concentrations. It hasn't been in the cards for a withdrawal for... well, since the fifties."

"I think you need to correct that," Delaval remarked, "and that's not a suggestion, either. How much time will you need to put a plan on this desk?"

"I would estimate drawing up such plans will take the better part of two weeks, Mr. President," Gates informed him.

"You obviously didn't catch what I said to Admiral Talbot about our troops dying a dozen a day," Delaval reminded him. "Further, you've known for at least a month, probably longer, that I would want to implement the keystone proposal of my administration fairly early in my term. You have one week, General Gates. In one week, those plans or your resignation — one of them — on my desk. As for the rest of you," he added with a note of finality, "if you think you need the extra time to work on this, feel free to skip tonight's Inaugural Balls. I think we're done here." The Joint Chiefs rose, saluted their Commander-in-Chief, and filed back out of the Oval Office.

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As was customary, the heads of all the major government agencies submitted their resignations to the new President as a matter of formality. This allowed the incoming administration to pick their own people to place at sensitive points within the bureaucracy.

James McKinnon had presented his letter to President Delaval mere minutes after Delaval's meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Please have a seat, Secretary McKinnon," Jules told him. "We have a few things to discuss, and this is probably a good time." McKinnon took a chair in the Oval Office.

"You have probably realized that the foreign policy of this administration is going to be quite different than previous administrations," Jules offered by way of introduction. McKinnon nodded and Jules continued. "I don't want to unnecessarily deprive us of experience that might come in handy when dealing with nations with whom we have had — how can I put this? — less than stellar relationships. That's why I'm reluctant to willy-nilly shed department heads, and I'm especially reluctant in your case. Everything I've heard points to you as a thoughtful, steadying influence, and that strikes me as something worth keeping.

"I must ask you, then, if you see yourself having a problem carrying out the policies of this office now that Doug Farnham is not making policy? If you feel you can carry water for this office, I'd like you to stay on at State."

"This is very unexpected, Mr. President," McKinnon answered. "It's a fairly rare event for a President to retain the Secretary of State from an outgoing administration of a different party. To be honest, I

have not entertained the idea yet. I presumed my resignation would be accepted without fanfare, and I would stay on merely long enough to allow my successor to be confirmed by the Senate. I wonder if I might have a little time to mull it over?"

"That's not a problem, Secretary McKinnon. While you're mulling it, you're still Secretary of State, so take your time. The instant you feel you aren't a good match, I'll want to know that so I can exercise this letter, but I'm counting on you being a good soldier." Delaval stood and extended his hand. McKinnon shook it, then turned and left.

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Jules Delaval wearing his first-ever not-rented tuxedo entered the ballroom of the Dupont Hotel and paused at the door. The doorman announced in his loudest voice: "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States." The band struck up *'Hail To The Chief'* and four Marine guards turned inward and saluted. Jules returned the salutes from the smiling Marines: "Thank you, Marines."

"Our pleasure, Mr. President," the senior Marine replied, smiling back.

James McKinnon, with Claire McKinnon trailing slightly behind, led the President through the crowd, pausing here and there to introduce him to this ambassador or that one. Most of the denizens of Embassy Row were here at The Dupont Hotel to welcome the new head of the American state. "Mr. President," McKinnon spoke, "I have the honor to present Señor Manuel Escondido, Spain's Ambassador to the United States, and Señora Linda Escondido. Manuel and Linda are among my closest and dearest friends in Washington, and I hope you will soon be able to say the same thing."

Jules took Manuel's offered hand and shook it, then did the same with Linda's. "I'm looking forward to it," he assured them before he and McKinnon moved on to new faces.

Reaching the head table, Delaval turned to face the crowd. "Thank you all for coming tonight to help celebrate the start of my term. I hope I don't disappoint you. Let's party!"

The band began playing dance music, and one of Delaval's aides came up behind him and whispered in his ear. Delaval nodded, and the aide motioned for an elegantly-dressed young woman who glided up to the President. "Mr. President, allow me to present Pavla Svobodova, the niece of the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic who is visiting Washington on behalf of her countrymen."

"Miss Svo... bodova," Delaval stumbled over the unusual syllables, "Would you care to dance?"

She held out her hand. Jules took it in his and led her to the dance floor.

"My uncle Vaclav (she pronounced it vutz-lahv) wanted me to carry his sincerest congratulations on your election, Mr. President," she told him as they began to move to the music.

"Thank you very much Miss Svo..."

She laughed. "Svo... bo... do... va," she coached him.

"Svobodova," he repeated.

"Perfect," she exclaimed. "See? It's not difficult at all." And she laughed again. "And I would be pleased if you were to call me 'Pavla'."

"There used to be a baseball player many years back —"

"Ron Svoboda," she finished for him. "My father is 'Svoboda'," she explained. "The ladies add 'ova' on the end, replacing the 'a'. It's just a custom."

"I suppose, as President, I'm going to have to learn lots of things I never thought much about until now," Jules Delaval speculated.

"Yes, Mr. President," Pavla Svobodova agreed, smiling, "I suspect you will."

"It is also my pleasant task and duty to pass on to you the warmest congratulations of the fifteen governors of your nearest neighbor, the so-called Constitutional Alliance and to offer my country's assistance should you decide you need a go-between in your relations."

"I appreciate that very much, Pavla," he assured her, "and my staff will be in touch with your ambassador in due course, I'm certain."

Over the course of the next thirty-five minutes, Jules Delaval also got to have similar conversations with the granddaughter of the British Foreign Secretary, the daughter of the Canadian naval attaché, the sister-in-law of the President of Venezuela, and a niece of someone at the French Embassy. At 35, Jules Delaval was just barely old enough to fill the office, although he had not yet 'turned' on Election Day. And although even a divorced man in such a position was a worthwhile catch, none of the young ladies expected to win his heart over a mere turn around the dance floor. Yet all realized that a smile and a bit of pleasant conversation could go a long way toward improving international relationships, and they were not above using their feminine charms to advance the careers of Grandfather, Uncle Max, or someone else closely related.

Delaval's aide leaned in and whispered in his ear: "Got to go, Mr. President." Delaval waved at the crowd and was whisked away to his next stop on the Inaugural Ball circuit.

At the St Regis Hotel, Delaval got another riotous welcome, followed by another short speech eerily similar to the scene at The Dupont, followed by another few dances with daughters or granddaughters or nieces of prominent and not-so-prominent figures on the Washington scene: the President of the National Geographic Society, the Editor-in-Chief of the Washington Post, to note a few. "Say a few words, dance with the ones we've vetted on your behalf, and be ready to head out to the next stop," he had been warned by his aides. He still did not have a Chief of Staff, but he had a pretty capable *staff* and *that*, he thought, *was half the battle*.

By the time his staffers and the Secret Service led him from the last of the Balls, Jules was ready to fall down. "Thank God, this doesn't happen every day," he told them in the limo on the way back to 1600 Pennsylvania. They all smiled.

"I have bad news for you, Mr. President," one of the Secret Service agents confided, "this does happen every day, Saturdays and Sundays included."

Jules groaned.

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In the early-morning hours of January 21st, the Estonian resistance released, apparently unharmed, eleven U.S. soldiers presumed 'lost behind enemy lines' with a message:

"The Free People of Estonia celebrate the end of one American presidency and the start of another and join with other free people throughout the world in their hope for a peaceful resolution of our conflict and the absence of further bloodshed. May this gesture of peace bear fruit one hundredfold."

This message was delivered to President Delaval during his morning briefing on the state of the world.

"Recommendations?" Jules prompted. "How shall we react to this?"

"This is very much a 180° turn for the Estonian Resistance," Admiral Jeremy Talbot offered. "They've always been a take-no-prisoners kind of movement. In fact, we always assumed these men were already dead. They're officially MIA, but everyone has considered them practically KIA. I'm not sure what to make of this."

Paul Armistead, the out-going National Security Adviser, butted in. "The fact that these presumed-KIAs are not, in fact, KIA is a genuine surprise, but let's not lose sight of the time-line here. All of the eleven returnees were captured since the election. This may

simply be a ploy to get us off our guard; that is, they may only have avoided killing any of them solely to be able to use them for this purpose. If it were up to me, I wouldn't trust them."

"Anyone else?" Delaval prompted. No one added anything to what Talbot and Armistead had stated.

"Okay," Delaval finished, "new rules of engagement for the Estonian theater: do not fire unless fired upon. Let's see what happens over the next twenty-four hours.

"Any word from Gates on those withdrawal plans?" he asked Talbot. Talbot shrugged his shoulders. "Well, keep him on it," Delaval ordered, "and make sure the Estonian People's Liberation Army or whatever they're calling themselves these days, know that we're not going to throw the next punch." The meeting broke up, and everyone filed out of the room.

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"Does this mean if I see an Estonian militiaman walking down the road with a captured M-16 over his shoulder, I can't 'wax' him?" the trooper asked with a dumb-founded expression on his face.

"I presume that's exactly what it means," his sergeant informed him. "You can point your rifle at him, but you can't pull the trigger unless he shoots first. If he takes off a-runnin' across the landscape, you can chase him down and tackle him, but you can't shoot him in the leg to slow him down." The soldiers gathered around for the briefing looked from one to the other in wonderment.

"Now, look," the sergeant continued, "I think it's nuts, too, but this came straight from Delaval's office and it's an order. Let's give the guy the benefit of the doubt, Okay? His orders are going to make more sense than the crap we get from people who haven't held a rifle in twenty years. Maybe he knows what he's doing better than the brass hats. If it gets us out of here a month earlier, I say 'great!'." A muttering of approval greeted the sergeant's pronouncement.

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"So, are they saying they are only going to return fire, not initiate it?" the Estonian trooper asked.

"That's what it sounds like," the militia commander responded, "although I'm not going to personally test it out." They laughed.

But later that day, an Estonian militia unit accidentally bumped into a Marine armored patrol on a side road off the E67 south of Märjamaa. Both columns halted with 400 meters between them, eyeing each other warily, then the Estonians turned and disappeared

into the dense forest alongside the road. The Marine column waited almost ten minutes in high alert, ready for an attack, then continued down the road. They didn't see any sign of the Estonians after that.

This encounter was routinely reported up-line and joined four other similar reports and one other describing an Estonian ambush resulting in two more American casualties and the loss of a substantial amount of equipment for an estimated five Estonian losses.

The second day of the new policy was quieter, with no exchanges of gunfire reported, and the third day was equally as quiet.

On the fourth day, the Swiss ambassador called on the State Department.

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Delaval's morning briefing included what he considered good news from James McKinnon.

"The Swiss have asked us — apparently on behalf of the Estonian People's Liberation Army — whether we are prepared to disengage — their word — and withdraw our troops from their land," McKinnon told the gathering. "I told the Swiss ambassador that I was quite sure that was your intent, Mr. President, and asked if he had any further information from EPLA as to their thoughts on the matter."

Delaval leaned in expectantly, an obvious offer to McKinnon to continue. McKinnon obliged him. "The EPLA has reciprocated with their own 'do not fire unless fired upon' order to all their units. Mr. President, you have just unilaterally forced a cease-fire in Estonia. Congratulations." There was a smattering of polite applause around the table.

Delaval turned immediately back to business: "How are those withdrawal plans coming along, Admiral Talbot?" he asked.

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On the sixth day of Delaval's presidency, General Thomas Gates presented his resignation, having failed to deliver coherent plans for the theater-by-theater withdrawal of U.S. forces, and Delaval had accepted it on the spot.

"Where's Tobias?" Delaval inquired of Admiral Talbot a few moments after Gates' departure. Tobias, he had always felt, was a more likely Army Chief of Staff than Gates, but Wilfred Tobias had just dropped off the radar about the time the western states seceded. There were rumors that Tobias had walked out over differences with the Farnham administration, but he hadn't shown up on CNN as an expert commentator either, and that was considered strange.

Someone angry enough to dump a promising military career certainly would have no qualms about going on national TV to assert that the President was a moron, would he? Yet Tobias had simply dropped out of sight.

Talbot's reply caused Delaval's jaw to go slack: "General Tobias is in custody, I believe, Mr. President."

"Why?" Delaval pressed.

"President Farnham considered him an unacceptable security risk," Talbot informed his new Commander-in-Chief. "Tobias was unwilling to go to war over the secession of the Constitutional Alliance and voiced his support for letting them depart in peace. Farnham felt that were Tobias to cross over, the information he held in his head would be —"

Delaval cut Talbot off mid-sentence. "Where is he being held?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pr —"

"Find out. Spring him. Bring him here. I want to talk to him face-to-face." Delaval pushed the phone across the table toward Talbot. The meaning was clear: *Don't wait. Do it right now.*

When Wilfred Tobias was ushered in to see the President the following day he was dressed in civilian garb. He did not salute the President, but responded to the outstretched hand Delaval offered him.

"Have they treated you well?" Delaval asked him.

"As well as any of the other prisoners, I suspect," Tobias offered ruefully. Tobias' physical appearance did not give Delaval confidence that the other prisoners were being treated very well at all.

"I want to apologize to you on behalf of the American people, General Tobias," Delaval began, but Tobias held up his hand in protest.

"It's not 'General', anymore, Mr. President," Tobias corrected him. "I resigned my commission just minutes ahead of my arrest, and I presume President Farnham accepted it, so I'm no longer 'General' Tobias, and you are not my Commander-in-Chief. 'Mister' Tobias suits me just fine these days."

"I'm afraid you'll always be 'General' Tobias to anyone who, like me, came up through the ranks," Delaval explained. "Indulge me."

Tobias nodded his head and smiled. *The American people made the right choice*, he thought, *sending this sergeant to Washington.* "As you wish," he agreed.

"I called you here," Delaval continued, "for several reasons. One, your imprisonment was and is an affront to all men of conscience, and it has ended as of right now. Two, Tom Gates is

gone, and I need to replace him with someone capable. You're the most capable military man I can think of right off the top of my head. I'd like you to take over for Gates." Jules extended his hand to show the two sets of stars it held. "I want you to start today... in fact, now."

Wilfred Tobias reached out and took the rank from Jules Delaval's hand, stood up, and saluted. "Yes, sir."

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Talbot smiled, glad that he at last had some good news to offer his boss. "General Tobias expects to have a first draft before the end of the day," Talbot answered. "If you approve, he promises a final by Friday. He thinks implementation can start immediately thereafter with the first troops being withdrawn the following week."

"Thank you, Admiral Talbot. Please offer my congratulations to General Tobias, and have him go direct-to-final. Anything he'd miss is something we'd all miss. No sense delaying the inevitable.

"Anything else on the table?" Delaval asked.

"There's just one other thing, Mr. President," Paul Armistead added. "The Libyans have apparently initiated their own 'don't fire unless fired upon' policy. NSA presumes it is an invitation, but there hasn't so far been an official announcement."

Jules rubbed his chin, thinking. *I hope Tobias is ready for this*, he thought.

25 - Dust Settling

Three weeks after the inauguration, General Wilfred Tobias briefed the President on the state of the military.

"The withdrawal from Estonia is nearly complete, Mr. President," he assured Jules Delaval. "There has been no significant conflict there since your cease-fire order, save for the initial 72 hours.

"Withdrawal from Libya proceeds satisfactorily, and, as with Estonia, there has been no substantial military contact with the Libyan resistance forces since their cease-fire was met with our matching response. I estimate the last troops will leave Libyan territory within about six days barring any unforeseen glitches.

"Yemen has likewise been extremely quiet, probably in anticipation of us beginning to withdraw.

"Serbia is the hard-case. We instituted an informal cease-fire more than a week ago, and it doesn't seem to have done any good. We're still being ambushed on a regular basis, and I'm about to lift the 'don't fire' order as an object lesson."

"Agreed," was all Jules Delaval said.

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The locals had been wondering for months what all the new construction was east of town, but the mayor wasn't saying and nobody on the city council would say anything, either, not even to their families. Their answer, when they gave any at all, was that they didn't know, and wouldn't say even if they did. Most people suspected that one or both of those statements was a — well — less than completely true.

The 140,000 square-foot building's construction provided much employment for the townspeople, but whenever any of them would ask "Who's this being built for?" or "What's this going to be used for?" they were answered by shrugs. In fact, the contractors doing the building did not, themselves, know the ultimate purchaser of this new structure. The purchase of the site, the contracts for the construction, the permits, the endless contacts with city, county, and state officials, had all been made by go-betweens who always warned their counterparts in government or industry: "The instant we see in the press any hint that the real identity of our principals has leaked out, we will pull the plug on this project the very same day. If you

want to see it open for business and hiring your friends, relatives, and acquaintances, do them all a favor and keep your guesses to yourself."

Mayor Paul Gorsky, did, as a matter of fact, know who was behind this building and what it would one day be, and he was intent that it would open for business on his watch. Rawlins, WY was going to become a "big city" if he could just keep his wife, Denise, from wheedling the name out of him. *Damn*, he thought, *I hope I don't talk in my sleep.*

The latest development in the industrial park southeast of the town-proper was the arrival of flatbed trucks carrying what seemed to be heavy milling equipment, or something like it. Some of the townfolk found employment offloading and installing *some* of the equipment, but there had been a series of shipments that came with their own installation crews, and no one from the Rawlins area had been able to find work on those jobs. Other shipments *were* handled by locals, but in parts of the building separate from those earlier deliveries now housed behind drapes and partitions prominently marked "Authorized Personnel Only".

On the day the plant did open for business, that business consisted primarily of interviewing local people to see if they had the right skill sets.

"Now hiring," the half-page announcement in the Daily Times blared, "Machinists, lathe operators, metallurgists, front-office, back-office, freight handlers, bookkeepers. Apply in person. Resumes helpful but not necessary."

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"Name?" the interviewer demanded.

"Arlen Swift," the applicant answered.

The interviewer ruffled through a pile of papers and extracted Arlen Swift's package, then looked up at the face before him. "How good are you, Mr. Swift," the interviewer asked, "at keeping secrets?"

It was the first time Arlen Swift had been asked that question at a job interview, and he wasn't quite sure how he ought to respond. He took a few seconds to get his thoughts together. "Better'n most, I hope," he answered.

"Do you drink?"

"Only at home," Arlen assured him.

"Smoke?" Arlen shook his head: *No*. "Drugs?" *No*. "Anything else we ought to be asking you about?" Arlen shook his head again: *No*.

"What do you know about firearms, Mr. Swift?"

"I own a few."

"Have you ever made any?" the interviewer asked.

Arlen laughed. "Up until a year or so ago, you could go to jail for a real long time for doing that."

The interviewer looked into his eyes trying to gauge the sincerity of the answers he just heard. Finally, he reached down into a briefcase and brought out a set of plans. "What does that look like?" he asked as he handed them to Arlen.

Glancing quickly at the papers, Arlen issued his assessment: "Fairly typical semi-auto pistol, from the looks of it." He handed the papers back.

"Difficult to build?" the interviewer probed.

"Might go through a false start or two on the first one," Arlen opined, "but after that, no. This is ordinary stuff. Anybody who passed shop class and has a few years experience under his belt wouldn't find this much of a challenge."

"You seem pretty confident in yourself, Arlen. Is that justified?"

Arlen smirked. "I taught shop for three years when times were tight. Yeah, I'm pretty confident, and it's justified."

The interviewer dropped the plans into the briefcase by his side. "We can start you at \$57,500," he told Arlen. "Interested?"

Arlen held out his hand. "I'm going to enjoy working here. By the way, who am I working for?"

"We don't know the official name yet. The lawyers haven't told us how we will be known to the public, but the money for this —" he swept his hand around the building, "— the original funding came from Colt. This probably won't be 'Colt' *per se*, but it will be a wholly-owned subsidiary. Don't spread it around, okay?"

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Barrett Firearms was doing the same thing in a semi-rural area south of Albuquerque. In three weeks, they, too, would be looking for local talent.

Smith and Wesson's plan was to have their facility up and running completely staffed by existing S&W employees on temporary loan to their new subsidiary operation in Big Spring, TX before they would start hiring new headcount. Colt's public announcement beat theirs by a mere 50 hours.

Remington Firearms, on hearing rumors of its competitors moving into the Alliance, greased the skids under its own plans for doing likewise. In another eight weeks, their new plant in Abilene would take over responsibility for existing orders from dealers in the Constitutional Alliance, and their new line coming out of Texas would

include the long-rumored .583 Remington "Avenger", a bolt-action rifle with a range exceeding 2800 meters. Despite the fact that no one could reliably hit a designated target at that range, Remington would be unable to keep the Avenger, or ammunition to fit it, in stock for the first five months of its life.

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A person crossing from Georgia into Alabama would only have to show their driver's license or similar identification on entering. They would be asked a very few simple questions at the border: "Are you employed?", "By whom?", "What is the purpose of this trip?", and "How long do you plan on being in Alabama?".

Anyone who admitted to being in the employ of the U.S. Government or one of its connected vendors would, typically, be refused entry unless the purpose of the trip was to interact government-to-government. That was, at this point, a very rare event. In any case, the border between the U.S. and the Constitutional Alliance was charitably described as 'porous'. Anyone intent on entering the Alliance illegally would have little or no difficulty doing so at any of the thousands of unofficial border-crossing points.

Alliance citizens attempting to enter U.S. sovereignty encountered a much more formidable barrier, and until formal nation-to-nation diplomatic relations existed, only those with existing U.S. passports were able to freely leave and re-enter Alliance territory. Afterwards, of course, each of the newly-independent states issued their own passports. This completely flustered U.S. Immigration officials, having to deal with Texas passports and Colorado passports, although Europeans thought it quite sensible.

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For the federal government of the Constitutional Alliance temporarily conducting business in Midland, TX, the arrival of a trade delegation from Washington DC caused no end of confusion. There was no 'agency' that anyone could think of that might reasonably be expected to meet with them.

"Well," the delegation's leader began, "to whom would we speak to arrange for a liaison between us and the firms within the Alliance with whom we or our citizens may want to do business? Don't you have a Department of Commerce or a Chamber of Commerce?"

"I imagine the individual states may have chambers of commerce, and counties and cities within them may also have their own, but there isn't a federal-level function like that."

"How do you do business at a government-to-government level?" the delegation leader asked dumbfounded.

The Alliance functionary shrugged. "What government-to-government business are you talking about?"

"Well," the delegation leader stumbled, "it seems most of the companies that supply our armed forces with armaments have moved those operations into the Alliance. Regardless, we still need to replace worn out equipment, and we're interested in some of the newer products they've developed since migrating here. I assume that purchases of war materiel, especially in the quantities we typically purchase, would be handled at a government-to-government level."

"I think that's a bad assumption," the Alliance functionary replied. "We have no export restrictions of any sort such that you might need the assistance of someone in the government to give you a waiver or a permission slip. If there's something you want to buy from a company housed within the Constitutional Alliance, you issue a purchase order, they bill you, you send them the money, they send you the goods. This government has no authority to get involved in that process."

"Are you saying any of our citizens could order weapons of war and your companies would ship that order?"

The Alliance functionary shrugged. "Unless you stop it from crossing the border."

"Of course we'd stop it from crossing the border!" the delegation leader nearly shrieked, "Wouldn't you? What do you do when one of your people orders a crate of Stingers? Ship the order?"

The Alliance functionary looked a little confused. "Well, yes, I guess," he admitted.

"You're all crazy!" the delegation leader muttered.

"Possibly," the Alliance functionary allowed, "but our violent crime rate is one-third yours, and there aren't any legal firearms on your streets. Tell me again which one of us is crazy? When we left the United States, your people destroyed our currency. Today, you can buy an Alliance dollar for two-point-two Amers. Maybe we're crazy, but we're living a lot better than you. If that's 'crazy', I'll take a double-order."

Belgrade, Serbia

"The cease-fire is officially over," Captain Parks informed his men. A cheer arose from the assembly. "You may fire without having been fired upon, although that hasn't actually been a problem for us, has it?" The men snickered.

"We also have orders to move northwest toward Subotica and Bajmok, from which point we will exfiltrate through Hungary. Basically, we're fighting our way clear of Serbia. Our long Serbian nightmare is coming to an end." Another cheer.

"Where do we go after Hungary, Captain?" one of the men asked.

The Captain shrugged. "My orders don't say, but if what I hear is true of other outfits, we're on our way home to be mustered out. All of you slugs are going to have to find jobs."

"Captain," the soldier responded jokingly, "you're going to have to find a job, too. Let me have a copy of your resumé before we get mustered out, and I'll pass it along to my Dad." The soldier winked.

"I think my own father would be very upset by that, Peterson. I think he already has plans for me to take over for him," and Captain Parks winked back.

The Oval Office, Washington, DC

"I swore to 'preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution'," Delaval told his cabinet, "and that no longer includes 'the right of the people to keep and bear arms', but I need somebody to tell me how I'm going to deal with this," and he dropped the report on the table.

The report was the FBI's latest summary of crime statistics for the 35 states of the United States of America. Page after page was uniformly glum, showing violent crime rates up sharply in every category beginning shortly after the passage of 'The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' eighteen months prior, with a steeper rise after the confiscation of all those civilian firearms not voluntarily surrendered. Plainly, whatever firearms control 'The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' had accomplished, it had done nothing to improve public safety. Even the New York Times had noticed the carnage on the streets of America and had begun to soften its traditionally anti-gun editorial stance.

"Perhaps This Was A Mistake," the headline of the *Times'* editorial page opined, and went on to suggest that it now appeared likely that America was simply a more violence-prone nation than anyone had ever suspected. Indeed, both the UK and Australia had seen their crime numbers jump after each had launched near-total bans on civilian ownership of firearms, so much so that for a time both nations had higher crime rates than did the U.S. The United States had retaken, easily, the lead position as 'the most violent place on

Earth' after 'The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' went into effect, and it was this that now weighed so heavily on Jules Delaval.

What made it worse was that crime statistics from the fifteen states of the Constitutional Alliance showed exactly the opposite trend. Violent crime had virtually disappeared in the states of the Alliance. It had never been high in any of them outside of their major cities: Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, Tucson, Birmingham, Jackson, and Montgomery. Vermont, in fact, historically almost always ranked as the safest state in the Union as far as violent crime was concerned. Now, the whole Alliance was beginning to look like Vermont despite (or perhaps because) it was now possible to buy a knock-off Sten submachine gun in almost any hardware store in the Alliance for eighty 'allies', as the Alliance dollar was now called.

"When the New York *Times* abandons a position it has held and promoted with religious fervor for a century, something is happening that we had better pay attention to," Delaval told his cabinet. "What are we going to do about this," he asked them, "and how are we going to do it?"

There was a long pause before Lisa Maersk, Jules' new Chief of Staff, broke the silence. "It's pretty obvious we took the guns away from the wrong demographic," she started, "but I have no illusions we're going to be able to reverse that course without paying a very heavy price in the court of public opinion. Getting Congress to admit they made an error is a battle you will never win, and trying to get them to do so will involve a very dirty street fight in which we will all get covered in mud... or blood."

"So, you're saying I should just grin and bear it?" Jules asked. "Let more people die in hold-ups, muggings, carjackings."

Lisa nodded. "Until the New York *Times* and other like outlets start demanding you do something, I think you should let events unfold. There is a time to make things happen, and there is a time to let things happen. We're clearly not yet in the 'manufacturing' stage. Yes, more people have to die. The media elite are not yet frantic, and we need them on the edge of crazy-with-panic unless you'd like to fight this battle house-to-house and street-by-street."

Jules grimaced but said nothing. When the meeting began to break up, he motioned to his National Security Adviser, Paul Armistead, another hold-over from the prior administration that had avoided the necessity of running a new candidate through the Senate's 'advise and consent' gauntlet.

"Yes, Mr. President?" Armistead asked as the rest filed out of the room.

"I just wanted to ask, Paul, since you didn't contest Lisa's assessment that we need the media elite, as she said, 'on the edge of crazy-with-panic', whether you agree with that?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. President," Armistead answered, "I think Lisa was absolutely correct on that score."

"Yes, it did have the ring of truth, didn't it?"

"Paul, push them over the edge," Delaval ordered. "I don't need to know about it."

"Yes, Mr. President."

Atlanta, Georgia, 3:22 AM

Hannah Carpenter-Bowen, arguably the prettiest weather girl ever to stand in front of a TV camera, was late. She had just over two hours before she had to be primed, primed, and ready to go live with the morning weather report at WAGA-TV. The last thing she needed was one more red light, but she stopped anyway. The beautiful Spring morning had given her an exhilarating top-down drive so far, and she just wasn't in the mood for a ticket, which she was sure she would get for running this light, thanks to the omnipresent traffic enforcement cameras operating throughout downtown.

As she sat there in her Porsche 911, its motor grumbling with barely suppressed power, waiting for the light to turn, a man crossed the street in front of her, then turned abruptly and pointed a gun at her head.

"Get out of the car," he snarled. She hesitated only a moment, then unbuckled her seatbelt and pushed the door open. The carjacker grabbed her arm roughly and pulled her hard away from the car. She stumbled and fell to the pavement as the carjacker took her place behind the wheel. Then the thief casually turned and fired one bullet into the center of her forehead.

The Porsche roared away from the corpse of Hannah Carpenter-Bowen, once the prettiest weather girl ever to stand in front of a TV camera.

812 5th Avenue, Manhattan, 7:28 AM

George Carmody, Vice-president for National Affairs at NBC, stepped out onto the street in front of his apartment building and looked up at the sky. The weather report had gotten it correct for a change, and this was going to be a good day to walk to work after all. It was less than a mile to his office at Rockefeller Center, and the

exercise would do him good. He turned south toward E.62nd Street and started a brisk walk.

As he approached the corner of 5th Avenue and E.62nd Street, two rough-looking young men turned the corner in front of him not eight feet away. Before he had a chance to react, one of them hit him on the side of the face with a blackjack, and he crashed against the wall of the building with a cry of pain and slid to a sitting position on the sidewalk.

"Your wallet," the other screamed at him.

Carmody fumbled in the inside pocket of his suitcoat trying to connect with his wallet, but his fingers were having a hard time following the orders his brain was issuing. Impatience overtaking him, the thief reached in to help Carmody and pulled the wallet free.

"Hey," the thief told him, "you just made this a real good day for me, man.

"Not such a good day for you, though," he added, and taking a long slim dagger from a sheath on his belt, stabbed Carmody through the heart.

The two robbers turned back onto E.62nd Street and fled on foot.

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"The media world was stunned today by the sudden and senseless deaths of two of its own.

"In the early morning hours, Hannah Carpenter-Bowen, an on-air personality for Atlanta's WAGA-TV was killed in an apparent carjacking while on her way to do the morning weather show for *'Wake Up, Atlanta!'*. Ms. Carpenter-Bowen was shot by the carjacker or carjackers after she was dragged from her car. Police have fuzzy traffic-camera video but so far no leads.

"Also this morning, George Carmody, an NBC Vice-president was killed in a mugging outside his 5th Avenue apartment when the muggers, possibly angered by his actions, stabbed him to death. Stunned onlookers said the attack was started and completed in mere seconds. New York City Police are interviewing witnesses. One city official admitted that this might just be a case of 'wrong place, wrong time'."

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"Disappointed," read the headline on the editorial page of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*.

We had high hopes when the 'Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' received convincing votes in both houses of Congress just eighteen months ago, and President Farnham signed it into law. We were sure deep down in our hearts that we were moving to make our nation a safer place, and we were sure deep down in our hearts that the secessionists were going to regret their hasty actions making guns of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions easily available to one and all, good and bad, adults and children.

We were sure deep down in our hearts that the FBI's Uniform Crime Statistics would show, once and for all, that those gun nuts really were nuts. We were sure that crime, violent crime, and especially gun crime would become rampant in the Constitutional Alliance and that they would finally see the error of their ways, repent of their sins, and come home where they belonged much like the parable of The Prodigal Son.

And we were wrong.

Although the Constitutional Alliance doesn't have an FBI, they do have the equivalent, called 'The Governors' Crime Information Consortium' or 'GCIC', and they collect and publish crime statistics in a manner almost identical to that used by the FBI. Their numbers are, therefore, very comparable to those of the FBI. It may not be McIntosh-to-McIntosh, but it is clearly apples-to-apples.

And this is what the numbers say:

Over the past twelve months, overall violent crime in the Constitutional Alliance is 67% lower than in the thirty-five states of the United States: rape and other sexual crimes down 52%, murder down 59%, robberies and home invasions down 68%.

Clearly they are doing something right, and we are doing something wrong. The most attractive target is the fact that the Constitutional Alliance is an armed society and ours is a disarmed society. We seem to have independently verified Robert Heinlein's

speculation that 'an armed society is a polite society', but we have done so by proving that a disarmed society breeds chaos.

It's time we admitted our mistake.

It's time to repeal the 'Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' and begin to re-create the polite society we all hoped for — in vain.

The following day, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The White Plains Journal News*, the *Kansas City Star*, and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reprinted the editorial *verbatim* rather than run their own.

26 - Cleaning Day

U.S. State Department, Washington DC

James McKinnon rose and extended his hand as his guest was ushered into McKinnon's office.

"This is an historic moment," McKinnon announced. "I hope that we are on the doorstep of a new era in the way the federal government relates to the states," he continued. "We may even be on the verge of restoring the United States to its full complement of states."

Theo Kotsouklas, Secretary of State for the Constitutional Alliance, nodded in acknowledgement of McKinnon's words.

"There are many within the Constitutional Alliance who would be extremely pleased to see our fifteen sisters rejoin the United States — as full partners," Kotsouklas responded. "I am looking forward to hearing your proposals, Secretary McKinnon."

McKinnon looked a little confused by that, but led Kotsouklas and his retinue toward the conference table that had been set up for this meeting. McKinnon's aides were already seated there along with several officials of the United States' government.

When they were all seated and settled, McKinnon began the meeting.

"Since the fifteen states of the Constitutional Alliance became independent nation-states after being states of the United States, the United States government — the Executive Branch — has suggested that readmission is the proper path toward statehood for the Constitutional Alliance. In view of that —"

Kotsouklas held up his hand to interrupt McKinnon, and McKinnon paused mid-sentence.

"There are a great many changes that must take place within the United States before the members of the Constitutional Alliance will be ready to discuss, much less act upon, rejoining the United States," Kotsouklas informed him. "It's true that the major stumbling block has been removed: that horribly misnamed 'Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' which, as you discovered, provided not an iota of public safety. The absence of a Second Amendment is not a particular problem, either, since the Constitution of the Alliance does not have one. We also don't have a Fourth Amendment, but we don't seem to be suffering without one."

"Those, however, are not 'stumbling blocks'. The form of central government now in place in the Alliance is, I do not doubt you have noticed, radically different than the form that still exists for the United States.

"For example, most federal laws are not in effect within the Alliance. Your entire Code of Federal Regulations does not exist for us. There is no federal income tax. Our federal government subsists on dues paid directly from the individual states.

"Most importantly, our Constitution specifically recognizes — not 'grants' — the prerogative for individual states to secede. That alone may be the greatest stumbling block of all, for did we not come to blows over the issue?" McKinnon nodded. "Before any member of the Alliance would entertain an invitation to rejoin —"

"Invitation?" McKinnon interrupted, looking somewhat confused. "I was under the impression that this meeting was convened at your request."

"Hardly," Kotsouklas responded haughtily. "The Alliance is doing fine as we are. We were given to understand, from the Czech ambassador who has been the primary go-between, that you sought this meeting. Perhaps we ought to invite the Czech ambassador to join us so that we may establish a baseline for negotiations."

"I think that is an excellent idea," McKinnon agreed. Kotsouklas took out his cell phone and dialed.

"Embassy of the Czech Republic, good morning, how may I direct your call?" a voice answered Kotsouklas.

"*Dobry den,*" Kotsouklas answered, "Good morning. This is Theo Kotsouklas, Secretary of State for the Constitutional Alliance. I would like to speak to Ambassador Šebesta," he told her.

"Good morning, Your Excellency," the flustered operator responded, not sure of the proper form of address for a secretary of state. "Please hold the line, and I will locate the Ambassador for you immediately."

There ensued a pause lasting over a minute while the operator tried several places where the Ambassador might be at this time of day, finally locating him in the kitchen where he was discussing the menu for the next formal dinner with the kitchen staff. Petr Šebesta was a very hands on administrator.

"Yes, Dana, what is it?" he asked the operator when the phone had been handed to him by one of the kitchen staff.

"Secretary Kotsouklas of the Constitutional Alliance is calling to speak to you on line three," she informed him.

"Thank you, Dana. I'll take it here," and he pressed the flashing "3" button, disconnecting the operator.

"Secretary Kotsouklas," he greeted his friend, "what can I do for you?"

"Ambassador Šebesta, please pardon the interruption. I know your day must be very busy. I am here in Washington meeting with Secretary McKinnon, and we wondered if your schedule might allow you to join us."

Šebesta was immediately cautious. "I will have to check with my secretary to see what's on my agenda. What, may I ask, prompts the request?"

"Secretary McKinnon and I are having an historic meeting, and we thought you might wish to be included in it. We both feel you should be part of this."

Relieved, Šebesta let his guard down. "I would be most honored to join you if my schedule permits. I presume you are at the State Department?"

"We are," Kotsouklas confirmed. "We'll adjourn and wait for your arrival."

As Ambassador Šebesta was led into the conference room, James McKinnon and Theo Kotsouklas rose to greet him and both extended their hands. Ambassador Šebesta took each in turn and shook them. The three turned and took seats at the table.

"I don't wish to put you on the spot, Ambassador Šebesta," McKinnon began when they were all comfortable, "but as the person most responsible for this meeting taking place at all, we each — Secretary Kotsouklas and I — thought you might like to say a few words to set the tone for what follows. Would you do us the honor, Ambassador?"

Šebesta hesitated a moment, then began speaking. "I clearly recall President Delaval's words at his inauguration to the effect that both the United States and the Constitutional Alliance are now incomplete because of their separation, and his hope that some sort of reconciliation might one day lead to a rediscovery of the benefits you all enjoyed before that separation.

"It was the Czech Republic, you may recall, that with its sister, Slovakia, first recognized the independence of the Constitutional Alliance, so we feel some responsibility for doing everything in our power to ensure that peace becomes the default condition between your two nations. Much has already been done in that regard, but there is nothing that adequately substitutes for face-to-face diplomacy. Therefore, we have taken the initiative of urging both of your nations to this meeting. I cannot express how gratified I am, personally, to see both of you sitting together in the same room, ready to handle your obvious differences as friends and not as enemies."

Kotsouklas smiled. "Ah, then there was no intention on your part that this conference might lead to a readmission of the Constitutional Alliance into the United States?" he asked Šebesta.

Šebesta hesitated again, now realizing that there was an ulterior motive to his being invited to join the discussion. "I, personally, think that is what will ultimately happen — a '*wiedervereinigung*' as the Germans say — 'becoming one again' — but 'when' is something no one can predict. We on the sidelines can only do our best to make sure nothing interferes with what is certainly your joint decision. In particular, we on the sidelines want to ensure that conflict does not interfere with that joint decision. In that regard, seeing you face-to-face talking about your issues is very comforting."

"I'm not sure that we have much, at this point, to discuss," McKinnon added. "It's unlikely that the United States will alter its policies enough to accommodate the unique requirements posed by the Constitutional Alliance, and I would be surprised were the states of the Constitutional Alliance to decide to give up that which they were ready to fight a nuclear civil war to defend."

"Secretary Kotsouklas, is there anything you'd like to add?"

"I think we should not so easily give up this historic opportunity, Secretary McKinnon," Kotsouklas replied. "There is much that we can do to lay the groundwork for future progress even if we cannot make much of that progress ourselves." McKinnon looked puzzled.

"For one thing, we can investigate and discover those things that each of us could do to move our policies in the desired direction. I know that the member states of the Constitutional Alliance seek nothing but 'peace, friendship, and honest commerce' with the United States. Reunification is not ruled out by this, but 'reunification without the ability to disunify' — that is, to secede — is not in the cards."

"If the United States is open to reunification, whether they call it readmission or something else, the first step is to amend their Constitution to state explicitly that the Union is not intended to be permanent and irrevocable, and that states may, at their own option, disunite."

"This would have, immediately, two salubrious effects: first, it would have the effect of making the secession by those fifteen states legal and thus erase any lingering ill-will on either side toward those states' actions. Second, it would allow existing states of the United States to 'vote with their feet'. If the United States is so certain that their system is, if not flawless, then nearly so, let the United States demonstrate that it does not need force to maintain the Union. Let it demonstrate that its member-states will maintain the Union without the threat of violence or economic disruption."

"After that, let us meet again to continue this conversational thread."

McKinnon's expression was best described as 'wry'. "I wonder who will be Secretary of State when that happens?" he asked aloud.

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The meeting in the Oval Office included Delaval's cabinet and staff, the Speaker of the House, the Minority Whip, the Vice President, and the Senate Minority Leader, along with a few other selected movers-and-shakers from both houses.

"I realize, Mr. President," McKinnon began, "that reunification is one of your hot button issues, but I have to warn you that, based on my contacts with the Alliance, reunification is going to be a near-impossibility. The set of conditions demanded by the Alliance is such that... well, it's tantamount to us being admitted to statehood in the Alliance. Here's a sample:

"Their primary demand is a Constitutional amendment recognizing the prerogative of the states to withdraw from the Union, that is: to secede on their own initiative." Some of the Congressmen shook their heads. *Not going to happen*, the thought flitted through each of their brains.

"The 'Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' has already been repealed, so that's no longer a problem, but they point out that since their successful secession, a great many firearms have been produced and sold within the Alliance that still cannot be easily obtained by United States' citizens because they are what we call 'NFA weapons': machine guns, submachine guns, rockets and rocket launchers, suppressors, *et cetera*."

"Suppressors? You mean 'silencers'?" one of the Congressmen asked.

"Yes," McKinnon answered, "although the term is actually a misnomer. You can't really silence a firearm. The best you can do is muffle the sound somewhat. In fact, in Europe, suppressors are called 'mufflers' among the people who have them."

"...'the people who have them'...?" another Congressman asked.

"Umm, yes. In Europe," McKinnon explained, "suppressors are fairly common where handguns are not restricted. It's generally true that indoor firing ranges in Europe require the use of a suppressor for practice so that other customers not have their hearing damaged." All the Congressmen had startled looks on their faces. "An interesting side-effect of that, by the way, is that in Vienna or Stockholm, for instance, you can buy a cheap suppressor for thirty or forty dollars.

Here, a suppressor can cost several hundred dollars before the two hundred dollar NFA tax. It's the tax on manufacturers and consumers that makes making suppressors a niche occupation. Supply and demand...

"Which brings us to the next of the Alliance's demands: recognition of the individual states' ability to nullify federal law within their jurisdictions."

"That means there would be no such thing as 'federal law' if it were enforceable some places but not other places," one Senator blurted out. "That's nonsense!"

McKinnon nodded. "That's what I've been saying. The Alliance's concept of 'federal law' is that it's enforceable only within federal enclaves: the District, National Parks, military reservations, and the like. They're calling for the effective repeal of virtually every act of Congress over the past hundred-seventy years or so. The CFR, the Code of Federal Regulations, in that case becomes an interesting historical relic, unenforceable anywhere not directly under the control of the Executive Branch. Certainly, it would be unenforceable in, say, New York City or Boston."

"That certainly sounds like a deal killer," the Vice President suggested.

"Let's not be hasty," Delaval urged. "Let's look at the big picture."

"The Alliance's economy is ripping along. Farnham's administration tried to cripple them economically and look what resulted: they're currently suffering deflation at an annual rate of one half percent while we're currently undergoing inflation. I don't know about you, but I'd prefer a little deflation. Why are they deflating and we're going the other way? Is it something they're doing or not doing that we should be imitating? If it's something we should be imitating, why aren't we imitating them? Pride? The good book tells us *'pride goeth before a fall'*. I'd prefer to avoid that, thanks very much.

"The Alliance's crime numbers are enviable. I think we've all been disabused of the notion that disarming the law-abiding makes their evening walks in the park safer. If there's anybody here who disagrees, I suspect you're in a very small minority these days." Delaval held up a copy of *Newsweek* open to a photograph. It showed a young teenager holding an ugly-looking submachine gun, barely more than a straight piece of pipe-plus-trigger in appearance, with a 30- or 50-round magazine she used as a forward grip and a suppressor screwed onto its muzzle. The caption on the photo read:

'Marie Tesh, 14, guards her family's livestock near Hardin, MT. Her submachine gun was built by a friend in shop class at the local high

school. The silencer keeps the animals from 'spooking' if she has to fire it.'



"I don't know whether or not they're actually teaching their kids how to build these in shop class, but one of my Secret Service guys says it's easier to build a full-auto like this than it is to build the semi-autos everybody was so worried about a few years back. In fact, it's well within the ability of anyone with a passing grade in shop to do so. Any bets as to whether she held up the 7-11 with this later that night? If she did, GCIC's numbers sure didn't show it. Maybe we should be giving our kids machine guns.

"We've had a 'War on Drugs' since the Nixon administration, and we haven't managed to get a grip on the problem so far. Over in the Alliance, you can grow pot in your front yard and buy cocaine as easily as we can buy aspirin, and their addiction numbers are no worse than ours. What is different is the number of addicts turning out for rehab. We rehab any addict that gets sent to rehab by a judge. There, users show up out of the blue and sign themselves in. We spend roughly 16 billion — that's with a 'B' — dollars every year just arresting and prosecuting drug users and dealers. The Alliance spends something like 2 billion doing rehab. I don't know about you, but I like their system better. Maybe we should be imitating that.

"I'll tell you one thing that's almost guaranteed," Delaval finished up. "I'm not the only who can see what's going on. If we make it possible for states to secede from this Union, the

Constitutional Alliance is going to get lots bigger in a very great hurry to the exact extent that this Union gets smaller. If that's what we're afraid of, we've lost one hell of a lot more than just fifteen states.

"And let me make one final point. Their states can secede and any of them could do so and apply for readmission to the United States — and they're not doing it. What does that suggest to you?

"Now, look," Delaval finished, "I'm supposed to be setting policy for this country, and all of you are supposed to be helping me figure out which direction to go. Let's get with it, okay? I need some concrete proposals to lay before Congress, and I'd like to do it soon. I promised the American people some leadership, and so far I've been doing a pretty poor job."

"Mr. President," Lisa Maersk comforted him, "I don't think anyone is holding you personally responsible for the current domestic situation."

"You're wrong, Lisa," he told her. "I do."

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Jules Delaval asked for and got the opportunity to address a joint session of Congress. It happened to be August 16th.

"This is something of an auspicious day," the President began his address. "On this day in 1780, the fledgling United States lost a major battle against British troops under Lord Cornwallis who would, barely more than a year later, surrender the *entirety* of his forces at Yorktown.

"This teaches us a valuable lesson in 'things won and things lost' that I hope you will all keep firmly in mind tonight as we talk about what we have lost and what we may regain and how we can get from here to there. To set the scene, 'here' is thirty-five states left in the Union and fifteen sisters having formed their own, very different, union. We're on speaking terms these days, no longer threatening each other with nuclear armageddon, but something is wrong.

"'There' is fifty states rejoined in a stronger union based on mutual respect. My staff and I have been working on a proposal for getting from here to there, and it is that proposal — singular — that I wish to lay before you tonight. For those who think there will be a rejoining under the old rules of the game, I feel confident in telling you that there is no chance of that happening. Let me tell you why.

"In the almost two years since the split, society in the two unions has diverged, in some ways radically. Many of the social tenets we previously accepted on their face have been disproven, often dramatically, and people on both sides of the split (but mostly on our

side) have gained a new understanding of what the Constitution says and what the Constitution means.

"In case you haven't guessed, that new understanding is seriously at odds with the way we have been doing business — the government's business — in your case, legislation. Most of you are aware — if you aren't, I can't imagine where you've been for the last three years — that some of that legislation is directly responsible for the fact that there exists today a Constitutional Alliance and a foreshortened United States.

"So, the primary thrust of the proposal to get us from 'here' to 'there' is focused on your part in the process. It is — it will be — primarily your job to remedy the conditions that caused fifteen states to secede. The Executive Branch will do everything in its power to make this happen, but the leadership position, the 'point', is yours".

Several legislators fidgeted in their seats. For the first time, someone with the ear of the public was laying the blame for the last several years squarely upon their shoulders, and only the willfully-blind were able to shrug that off. What Delaval was saying, most of them reluctantly acknowledged, was *true*.

"In Secretary McKinnon's talks with Secretary Kotsouklas, they made it quite clear that they like the way they have it now. If we are intent on having those fifteen states rejoin our union, we are going to have to become much more like them than they will become like us. In particular, they pointed out that, should they ever feel the need in the future to again leave the Union, they want to be able to do that without all the fuss and bother they had the last time. They insist that nothing can happen until our constitution is amended to specifically allow states to secede."

A mutter of disapproval rippled through the hall. *What was Delaval suggesting?* several of them wondered.

"So that's the first order of business," Delaval continued his address to Congress, "adding an amendment to the Constitution recognizing that states may depart from the Union on their own initiative; that is, without first getting the approval of the remaining states. We know we can do it. We've already done it with an amendment revoking the second amendment. This should be no more difficult. So I'm asking you to begin work immediately to craft the change that will pave the way for a reconstructed Union. It's your duty."

The scowls on the faces of many in the audience told Jules Delaval that this pitch was not going over very well.

"There is a danger, yes," Delaval continued, "that if we make it possible for states to secede without penalty more will leave the Union. If we want to recover the fifteen that were lost, we must risk

whatever it is we are risking by allowing no-fault secession. And that, I'm sure you realize, is only the first step. There are other things that need doing beyond that.

"They have also asked for — require, actually — that we publicly revise our interpretation of the Commerce Clause to cut Congress' authority over interstate commerce to cover agreements between state governments — only — and that we begin to pay strict attention to our ninth and tenth amendments.

"The first of these, redefining the limits of the Commerce Clause, will, according to my staff, summarily repeal nearly ninety percent of the Code of Federal Regulations. With a few minor exceptions, nothing any Congress has done since about 1850 will be left as federal law. There will not be an 'FBI', there will not be a 'War on Drugs', there will not be a 'National Firearms Act', and there certainly will not be an 'FAA'. Regardless, I'm asking you not simply to get started on this, but to get it done."

Jules Delaval stepped away from the lectern. There was no applause.

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Christopher vanPelt, Speaker of the House since the ouster of Julia Finnegan at the polls the prior November, leaned back in his chair and put his hands to his head. "I have a headache," he told nobody in particular. "Goddamn Delaval... I wish he had just tossed a hand grenade into that joint session instead of this tar baby."

Nelson Mortimer sighed. "He certainly is the dirtiest political in-fighter I've come across in many a year, and he's given us all a first-class ass-fucking. The worst of it is, I suspect we're about to get another one. How's your mail running? Mine is two-to-one for bending over and sloshing on the Vaseline."

"About three-to-one for Vaseline," vanPelt admitted.

Mortimer smiled. If he had had his way, South Carolina would have seceded with the other thirteen states two years ago, and this conversation would not be taking place. Inwardly, he was actually very pleased. Outwardly? That was another matter entirely. "Maybe we should order a 55 gallon drum. It looks like we'll need lots of it."

"You're not actually thinking of doing it, are you?" vanPelt asked, the incredulity clear in his voice.

Mortimer shrugged and looked around the room.

Patsy Forman (Cons-GA) gave her best 'disgusted' look and jumped into the conversation. "I don't know why you guys are so fixated on anal intercourse," she blurted, "but I don't think that's the case at all. What we have here is the perfect opportunity to get back

on track with the Constitution." VanPelt made to interrupt, but she held up her hand to silence him and he leaned back into his chair again. "The Constitutional Alliance has handed us a huge present all tied up with a pretty ribbon. It may not be the gift we were hoping for, but it will go well with the decor we should have had all along. Let's not send it back unopened."

Harry Tunstall (D-NY) snorted. "Not going to happen, Patsy. You're very naïve to think we could give serious consideration to this... monstrosity," he sputtered waving at the copy of the draft legislation sitting in front of him. "This overturns and reverses every progressive accomplishment we've made for a century and a half. That happens over my dead body."

Patsy Forman smiled back at him. "Okay," she agreed.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tunstall challenged her.

"Haven't you noticed?" Patsy Forman asked. "We're in the middle of a storm, and bad things happen in storms."

"Why?" Tunstall snapped back. "Because citizens can buy guns again? I'm not worried. We had overwhelming popular support for the actions we took. 'The Firearms Control and Public Safety Act' was almost demanded by our constituents. We gave them what they wanted — at the time."

"It's not your supporters you have to worry about, Harry," Patsy Forman explained. "There were a lot of people killed over that law — people who had relatives who didn't think it was necessary to go door-to-door shooting people for not turning in their guns. Those are the people you need to worry about.

"Those are the people you need to keep happy, Harry, because when they're unhappy they'll want to make you unhappy. Maybe they'll do that by voting you out of office at the next cycle, but maybe they'll do it by coming to visit you with their new guns.

"You know, lots of politicians never figured out why there was a second amendment, and you appear to be one of them. It was never meant to enable states to have their own militias. Never. It was never meant solely to enable people to defend their lives and property. Never. It was meant to keep us politicians in line. For decades — a century, maybe — we had a relatively docile population that let us get away with all sorts of things we shouldn't have been doing.

"You're thinking that we still have a docile population, and you may be right as far as most of them are concerned. But, Harry, I think we now have a militant core of the population who believe they have little or nothing left to lose. Harry, someone with that mindset is dangerous — deadly dangerous. That sort of person will fly an airplane into a building to see how many others he can take with him.

"Harry, you just don't want to piss those people off.

"If you're intent on pissing those people off, Harry, you can't count on me for support. I'm going to denounce you to Madame Defarge and let you worry about how sharp the blade is. I have a husband and a family, and I do not intend to die in office."

"So, you think we should support overthrowing our own government by legislation?" vanPelt asked.

"I support overthrowing most of the anti-constitutional things this government has done over the last century or more," Patsy snapped back. "I'm here as a delegate of the Constitution Party. I got sent here by the people because of a platform that rejects most of those actions. What position did you think I would take?"

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The Thirty-First Amendment to the Constitution was disarmingly simple in its language.

"The prerogative of the States to separate from the United States of America and 'to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them' shall not be abrogated. This amendment shall be effective immediately upon its ratification by twenty-seven states."

It won its two-thirds approval in both houses after a long but surprisingly polite debate marked by delegations one-by-one bowing to the tsunami of messages from constituents — a tsunami provoked in large measure by weekly television updates from The Oval Office. Delaval had shown himself to be heedless of the danger to his chances for re-election by 'naming names' in those weekly broadcasts, and Senators and Representatives shuddered when they heard their name mentioned because they knew it foreshadowed a bad week.

Indeed, Delaval felt that he would be a one-term President and was not upset by the prospect. His legacy was already secure: the only U.S. troop presence abroad were non-combat assignments giving training to and getting training from foreign military establishments at the invitation of their governments. The last shot fired in battle by U.S. troops had stopped echoing over five months ago. People now said that U.S. foreign policy appeared to be '*Figure it out for yourself. Let us know what you decide.*'

James McKinnon had forwarded to the Secretaries of State of the thirty-five states the text of the amendment with Congress'

instruction that each state should determine individually whether to submit the text to referendum or to deal with it in the Legislature.

Thirty-five states held referenda beginning in January and stretching into April. The tardiest states thus already knew that the required twenty-seven states had ratified the amendment by the time their people got around to voting. Many of the later states voted 'nay' in protest at thus being deprived of their say, but the twenty-seventh ratification had rendered all subsequent action moot.

On March 29th, James McKinnon reported to a joint session of Congress that the 31st amendment had been ratified.

That afternoon, New Hampshire, Maine, Ohio, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oregon seceded.

The President of the United States suddenly found himself the leader of a country that no longer included his home state. Jules Delaval submitted his resignation to his Vice President, Bob Carson, a citizen of a state still one of the United States, Pennsylvania, and began packing his bags.

27 - Dénouement

There being no penalty for aligning with the Constitutional Alliance, and a huge benefit to the populace who suddenly found themselves paying taxes only to their state coffers, the nine newly-independent states applied for and were granted admission to the Alliance.

Apart from Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Ohio, Alaska, and Hawaii, the Alliance now formed a solid slash across North America from the Atlantic to the Oregon coast on the Pacific including all of the Gulf coast, and from Mexico to the Canadian border isolating California and Washington, two 'islands' of the United States that counterpointed the four 'islands' of the Alliance. A better definition of 'fragmented' could not be imagined.

"*Was this all a giant scam on Delaval's part?*" the New York *Times'* editorial asked rhetorically. "*Was this his plan all along?*" But the second paragraph began: "*Does it matter?*" and went on to conclude that, in fact, it did not matter. The United States, the *Times* posited, had long before become two distinct nations united only by the difficulty of separating.

When the difficulty of separating became less a problem than the pain of staying one, the Union naturally (and predictably) began to dissolve. The *Times*, uncharacteristically for an Eastern Establishment media outlet, did not think this surprising.

In the end, The *Times* was right: it hardly mattered at all. The 31st amendment could not have gotten past Congress without a fundamental change in the attitude of Congress, the attitudes of the states, and the attitudes of the people all being at the time a *fait accompli*. The secession of a handful of states would not itself have happened without that fundamental change already being largely felt by a broad cross-section of the population. Given those changes, it was also a foregone conclusion that the 31st amendment would be approved when presented to the remaining states, as indeed it had been.

These attitude adjustments had already changed the relationship between the remaining states and the federal government. The country had reverted in a breathtakingly short time to the situation as of just before the start of the American Civil War, and commentators everywhere were beginning to understand the revolutionary change that had just taken place: the first civil war had changed the federal government from an agent of the states to their

master. The second had reversed that change. Whereas, in the mid-19th-century, it had been assumed that states could secede, now, two centuries later it was a recognized power of the states. The states now had the ability to de-fund the federal government merely for the price of 'going it alone', and they began to pay much closer attention to things happening in Washington, just as the Founding Fathers had envisioned.

Although the mental and physical battles attendant to the break-up of the United States largely centered upon the issue of guns and the right of the people to have them, the people, the media, and the several governments slowly began to appreciate that, as Governor Bill Mitchum had remarked so long ago, guns were merely a convenient *symbol* and nothing but a symbol. The real change involved a heightened appreciation of the fundamental nature of people, power, and government. When the people at last reawakened to the fundamental axiom of the original compact: that power originates in the people and is merely loaned to the government on the condition of its good behavior, the powerful bureaucracy that Washington had mutated into over the span of two centuries simply evaporated, having lost the support of the people who gave it its power. The people lost their respect for the system, and it was as if the plug had been pulled from its socket. Life support was turned off, and the patient simply died.

The United States continued to live, but the bureaucracy infecting its tissues had been killed by the only medicine capable of destroying it: the withdrawal of the respect of the people from whom it drew every last bit of its authority. Suddenly powerless, it collapsed. The government left behind after the dissolution of the bureaucracy was, like the shell of gases surrounding an old supernova, hardly recognizable to those who had always assumed that *'the way it was was the way it was supposed to be'*.

In a matter of a few years, vast herds of huge lumbering beasts of agencies-past one by one crumbled, their staffs reduced by attrition to hundreds, then dozens, then to a handful of archivists whose duty was to gather all the records and put them away for academics of future generations to study. In time, even the archivists departed, their last tasks, finally, complete.

For a while, the influx of ex-civil service workers flooding into the private sector made unemployment something of a problem, but the economy, now relatively unhampered by an army of regulators peering over its shoulders, soon absorbed the bulk of these workers — those who could actually produce value — and delivered to the rest the uncomfortable lessons from which decades of protection by the Civil Service System had shielded them. Eventually, even they managed to

find jobs, although none of them ever thereafter lived quite so high on the hog.

No longer forced to feed those herds and hordes of civil servants, the savings rate of the citizenry rose, the capital necessary for business expansion magically reappeared, and the GDP began a steep climb upward. Inflation slowed to a crawl, and then became a mild deflation occasionally turning back into a mild inflation as the rate settled into a dampening oscillation of plus and minus.

Peace settled upon the land.

28 - Epilogue

Seven years later

St Peters Hospital, Helena, MT

The elevator door slid open and a slim brunette stepped out onto the Pediatrics floor of St Peter's Hospital accompanied by an older man. His jacket collar sported a small enameled pin in the shape of a crossbow with a small diamond chip in the stock. She wore a khaki trench coat whose lapel held an identical pin save only for a second diamond chip. Finding a nearby chair, they seated themselves. She opened her newspaper and began to read. The nurses were bustling about preparing for the impending shift turn-over and paid them little attention.

Finally, one nurse noticed them sitting there and approached.

"Is there something I can do for you, ma'am... sir?" the nurse asked.

"Thank you, no," the woman answered. "we're just waiting for someone." The nurse turned away and returned to her duties.

At 6:42 PM, the elevator door opened to disgorge two women and a man, all dressed in scrubs. After exchanging the pleasantries of farewell, two went directly to the nearby nurse's station while the third turned down the hall toward the nurse's station at the far end of the floor. The man and the woman stood and followed the lone nurse.

When they were about halfway between the two nurse's stations, the man called to her: "Bobbie."

The nurse paused and turned to see who had called her. She looked at the faces of the two people who were slowly advancing on her and searched her memory for any matches.

"John? John Corson?" she asked the man.

The other woman opened her arms and ran toward Bobbie Farquhar. Recognition finally rose in Bobbie Farquhar's conscious, and she screamed "Lulu!" The two fell into each others arms, tears streaming freely from their eyes.

"I thought you were dead!" Bobbie squalled through the tears.

Lulu sniffed. "I thought I was dead, too," she admitted. "I spent two years in solitary confinement in Leavenworth until Delaval's reforms largely shut the military prison system down. None of the evidence they got from me could be used against me in a regular

court, and I think everyone was afraid they wouldn't be able to bury us political prisoners deep enough to save their own skins, so they let us live. Eventually, all of us — many of us — just walked out.

"Come. Let's go have dinner, just you, me, and John."

"I... I can't," Bobbie stammered. "I have to work."

"No," Lulu explained, "you don't. Your supervisor has already back-filled you for tonight by special request of Governor McEntaggart. You have the night off, and it's my treat."

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As they sipped drinks at Bobbie's favorite restaurant, they reminisced over the events of nine years prior and caught up on old times.

"You're a hero, you know," Lulu told Bobbie.

"Me?" Bobbie asked. "Why? All I did was transport stolen property."

"Ah, but it wasn't stolen property," John corrected her. "It was your property and mine, as well. You still have the odd notion that back then infected so many people: that the government had a right to keep secrets, even something so public as 'who works for the government?'. "

"— and gets paid with tax money," Lulu added quickly. "But now we recognize that governments don't have rights. Only people have rights, and one of the rights of the people is to know what happens inside government and, more importantly, who's doing it. You're a hero because you flipped on the light switch, that's all.

"If it's any consolation, they call me a hero too," Lulu told her, smiling.

Bobbie shook her head. She didn't understand why someone who ran for her life, who fled into exile leaving all her worldly possessions behind, would be considered heroic. She certainly didn't feel that way about herself. At least Lulu had been imprisoned and tortured. *Lulu paid for her heroism*, Bobbie thought, then realized that she, herself, had paid a price.

With dinner over and the conversation beginning to taper off, the meeting seemed on the verge of breaking up. Bobbie offered one more conversational gambit:

"I see that both you and John have the same pin. What is that?"

"It's a decoration," Lulu told her. "It marks those of us who wear it as someone who sacrificed a great deal to restore liberty to our nation." Lulu pointed to Bobbie's coat draped over a nearby peg, and

Bobbie turned to see that her coat's lapel now held a pin just like John's and Lulu's — like John's actually, with one clear diamond chip. Bobbie turned back toward the two with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Have I just been inducted into a club of some sort?" Bobbie asked.

"You were inducted years ago," Lulu explained, "but you never got your membership card."

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Florence Persky glanced up at her next customer at the Erie International Airport Hertz Rent-A-Car agency.

"Nice pendant," the man offered, indicating the crossbow dangling from her neck, a ruby chip embedded in its stock.

"Thanks," Flo responded. "How can I help you?"

"I have a reservation," he told her, "Miller, Steven."

Flo turned away to find his paperwork, pulled a folder from its rack, and turned back toward him in time to see him opening his wallet. Embossed on the wallet was a crossbow, an amethyst chip in its stock. She glanced at the wallet, then up at her customer.

"Mr. Miller, are you here for the Firemen's Convention?" she asked.

"No," Steven Miller admitted, "just personal."

"No, Mr. Miller," Flo informed him, smiling, "you are here for the Firemen's Convention. There's an automatic fifteen percent discount for everyone if they're attending the Firemen's Convention."

"Oh, yes," he responded, smiling back at Flo, "how could I have forgotten that? Of course I'm here for the Firemen's Convention."

Flo tapped some keys on her computer console, printed up Steven Miller's pick-up documents, peeled them off the printer and handed them across the counter.

"Have a great trip," Flo wished him.

Steven Miller smiled, turned, and headed out to the parking lot to find his rental.