

*The Children of Oberon Society for Like-Minded
Individuals and Fellow Travellers Protective Guild, New
England Chapter, is proud to present:*

Cybertech

*The Cyberpunk Technological Survival Journal
Issue #24 - Winter 2007/2008*



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Who is John Galt?



Commercial Satellite Imagery and Its Implications for Survivalists - by Mark O’Ryan

Most persons are aware of the presence and application of commercial satellite imagery (CSI), but few appreciate the broad and dangerous implications for privacy, especially those like survivalists who may have something non-criminal enterprise to conceal---e.g. retreats.

Fundamental to the detection and identification of surface features is spatial resolution-also known as Ground Sample Distance (GSD)-in the practical sense, this means that one pixel of the digital image represents a certain area. One-meter spatial resolution means one pixel equals one meter. The leading commercial providers (Space Imaging, Digital Globe and OrbView) all provide 1-meter resolution in panchromatic (“grayscale”), with some half meter products available. In regard to half-meter, Digital Globe launched its newest earth imaging satellite in SEP2007 with the intent of providing .5-meter imagery in greater volume.

Many persons seeking or constructing retreats should bear in mind the availability of high spatial resolution satellite imagery of their retreat locale. This has positive and negative attributes. On the positive side, a recent, high-resolution image in large-scale format would be invaluable in defense and resource planning. The negative is that this image is available for a price and ones retreat could be detected. Satellite imagery coupled with the land survey data, census information and tax records provide a very detailed and invasive description of ones property. It is a simple matter to match, via computer, ones address to geographic coordinates, then to an image.

The United States is not completely imaged in high-resolution detail owing to competition on the satellites and the cost involved in imaging an area that doesn’t sell, although any level of government could request collection of Areas of Interest (AOI) should they develop the curiosity and there is interest in creating more high resolution products with the intent to image all of the United States. The anticipated market for this is government---with considerable purchase being found amongst tax, code enforcement and law enforcement.

It would be prudent for a retreat builder to employ some means of Camouflage,

Concealment and Denial (CC&D) to restore the privacy of those parts observable from space and air. Covering excavations, dirt mounds and heavy equipment tracks are all within the budget of most persons and those techniques are found in many army manuals.

Countering detection also applied equally to post-construction. Critical elements of the retreat, such as ventilation and entry points should be well concealed, preferably with natural vegetation. Most of these techniques apply to sub-surface structures (which create a large footprint during construction), but any activity or component that can identify a retreat should be implemented under cover of CC&D. Natural features of a residence, like outdoor fireplaces, patios and outbuildings could be incorporated in the a concealment plan. In fact, one civil defense publication described how to conceal a shelter under a patio.

In the photo-expose entitled “Waiting for the End of the World” (Ross, Richard. Princeton Architectural Press, New York. 2004), the author critically (and disparagingly) examined many underground shelters. From the photos, many critical retreat components would be easily detectable and identified by a trained imagery analyst or other surveillant. I assess these critical components as having a high vulnerability owing to their function, difficulty of repairing/replacement, visibility and effect if neutralized. Concealing these features would have been trivial compared to building the retreat.

Of interest to the private citizen is that any area having Enhanced 911 coverage also has, probably, been imaged (usually by LIDAR). This is done to ensure that address information is properly matched to a structure, naturally eroding our right to be left alone and providing useful data to government agencies (like FEMA). This was done fairly recently in West Virginia, where the imagery collected for this enterprise, and paid for with tax money, is unavailable to the citizen and there was no way to “opt-out”. While this imaging was announced in the local paper (typical small print in some obscure part of the paper), the time between announcement and execution was too short to effectively implement counter-imagery (C-IMINT) measures.

We live in an increasing surveilled society, where the maintenance of anonymity and liberty will require increasingly sophisticated knowledge of surveillance technology in order to thwart those that hold our natural rights in contempt.

The Optoelectronics Xplorer

by “Deep Throat”

It was about ten years ago that the Optoelectronics Xplorer came out. At the time it was the top of the line in near field signal interception, and one of the few choices for scannists wishing to explore that facet of the hobby. This was well before \$100 scanners with the Signal Stalker and Close Call features that now allow even budget-minded hobbyists to get a piece of near field action. For some of us however, the line separating business and hobby gets awfully fuzzy. That's how my career started back in high school. A little exercise in hacking and boredom hit a certain level where people started to notice. That sort of thing wasn't even a crime back then (that changed quick enough), and the affected parties didn't want their security vulnerabilities made public. That's how I met Zed. Zed was originally with SOCOM, retired, bounced around “here and there”, and now works for Greywater as a “contractor”. Back in the day Zed was the one who “discovered” me, and we soon shared the same employer.

Knowing my fetish for exotic RF toys, Zed came to me one morning looking for a solution to a problem he was anticipating. He wanted to be able to know when “people nearby are talking about me”. He saw the old Optoelectronics R-10 I carried in my black bag, and was interested in an up-to-date version. This was in the days before Signal Stalker scanners mind you. A quick look through a Optoelectronics catalog showed him the Xplorer, the then current “state of the art” in portable near-field receivers. Out came the credit card, and a couple days later the item arrived via the brown truck of joy. We had fun “testing” the unit for a few days, and Zed took it off on a field assignment. A couple months later I heard back from Zed that the unit worked as expected, and that was all. We transferred to different sections, and although we sort-of kept in contact most of the news we received about each other was via third parties. In our line of work these things happen.

A couple weeks ago, I hear a familiar voice behind me say “Hello (REDACTED)”, and I spun around to see Zed. A little older, but still looking as feral and dangerous as the first time we met. He had a familiar object in his hands which I recognized as his Opto Xplorer. “The batteries won't hold a charge.” he said. “Can you replace them?”. I took the unit from him. “You're

still using this?" I asked. "Hell yea!" was his reply. "This things proven its weight in gold too many times to count. Worked so well I bought a second one." I told him I'd replace out the batteries on the unit ASAP, and he told me there was no rush as he was going to language school for a while and wouldn't need it. "What are they making you learn?" I asked. The reply didn't surprise me, "Farsi." With that Zed left and I found myself in temporary possession yet again of an Opto Xplorer. This was the first time since the introduction of near-field reception capabilities in scanners with Signal Stalker and Close Call that I had access to one, and after a quick battery pack replacement I wanted to see if it was still a viable piece of equipment.

Unlike most gear talked about in "Scanning Back", the Xplorer is still available from Optoelectronics. In addition to the original unit, they also offer an updated version with a spectrum display called the "X Sweeper", and a "Video Sweeper" that is intended for detecting wireless cameras in the 900 MHz. to 2.52 Ghz. frequency range. Earlier versions of the Xplorer were capable of being "unlocked" to provide full 800 MHz reception by sending the string "FE FE B0 E0 7F D6 78 19 52 27 96 34 45 88 01 FD" to the unit via a terminal program. This has become increasingly important as of late as current hobbyist-grade receivers don't cover this range, and old analog cell phones placed in test mode are seeing increasing use as surveillance devices. Many older Xplorers that are often available on the used market have been previously unblocked. According to old Internet posts you can tell by turning the unit on and checking the display as it powers up. Unblocked units will show "*Xplorer*" while blocked ones will show "Xplorer".

With the easy and inexpensive availability of Close Call and Signal Stalker scanners, is the Xplorer still relevant? I sought to find out. A search of the Internet found plenty of Usenet postings from the 1990s about the Xplorer on the alt.radio.scanner and rec.radio.scanner groups, but not much of recent mention. For that matter, there wasn't much mention of scanning applications for the Close Call and Signal Stalker or general near-field reception information among "current" hobbyists. The only people who seemed to be talking about it were in a different scene altogether. A scene filled with former military commo and intelligence types that appeared to have disdain for the average scanner hobbyist. As the saying goes "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." The weirdness factor was about to go up a few notches in short order.

The most interesting results of my web research on near-field reception

and the Opto Xplorer resulted in pointing me towards two gentlemen named “Hank Frost” and “Mike Jenkins” who were members of a group called “The Connecticut Survivalist Alliance”. Their web presences boasted a lot of information about communications monitoring, and its application in news gathering. Their approachability factor however seemed very small. Following their wishes for establishing contact, I generated a PGP key and sent them out an email. Their reply was quick, and after a brief exchange I found that I had traveled in similar circles with one of the members. It turned out that Jenkins had previously worked with Zed for a while. Once Jenkins found out that I not only was a friend of Zed, but the one who helped him out with his electronics, it was like stepping through a looking glass. “Anything you need, let us know.” he mailed me.

Frost and Jenkins are cold war veterans who “went John Galt” as they are fond of saying. No longer on the job, they now do “normal mundane civilian work”, and apply their “special skills” towards protecting their families and navigating around the brave new world. It's a sunny Saturday morning, and the three of us are driving towards New Haven in Jenkins' Subaru Impreza. “They have no (expletive deleted) clue!” Frost exclaims as we speed down I-91. “They don't even know how to do a search on the FCC's web site for simple frequency data.” he states with the disgust in his voice clearly evident. We're heading towards one of the more interesting monitoring destinations in the Nutmeg State to do some monitoring of an immigration rally. “There'll be a lot of different players there.” Jenkins tells me. “We secured an apartment from a like-minded individual where we can set everything up.”

Soon we're standing at the door of a non-descript looking apartment, and I meet the third musketeer, Ted. We all get settled in and Jenkins explains, “These rallies are good COMINT practice. The last one we did was up in New Hampshire. There are a lot of different players to monitor, and it gives us some real-world practice to keep our skill-sets sharp. They'll be marching right down the street in front of us, and we'll probably get some near-field hits off them.” Sure enough, when the party started the Xplorer went crazy and several new frequencies, not appearing on any hobbyist lists, were noted. From our totally unscientific field tests, the Xplorer managed to keep pace with a Signal Stalker scanner we were also using at the time to sniff out new “on site” frequencies. Ted explains “It's the same group of people who do all these rallies, whether it's immigration, anti-war, whatever. They got this fetish for protesting. For a while they were using FRS radios. It took us about a second to find them, and we

gave that information to some guys from Protest Warrior. Now they switched off to some Motorola XTN radios and change their frequency every event. They thought they'd be pretty safe, but they're pretty wrong." When asked why they single this particular group out, Jenkins responds. "I've got a few buddies who were crippled overseas, and they get (expletive deleted) from the VA. You don't see them protesting for better treatment of veterans, but they protest at the drop of a hat for people who aren't even in this country legally."

After that exchange, I tried getting back on track, and asked them how they choose the equipment they use when doing COMINT. "Whatever we find cheapest at hamfests and pawn shops." was the universal reply. Sure enough while there were some newer pieces of equipment like Signal Stalkers and Digital Trunktrackers, most of the equipment was a few years old, with Jenkins using a vintage PRO-43 and PRO-2006 for the bulk of the work he was doing today. When asked if they bough their Xplorer used, the answer was no. "When it it the market ten years ago, it was the only thing out there." Ted explained. "We knew it'd be a must for 'on-scene' monitoring. Now you've got those \$100 Signal Stalkers from Radio Shack that do the same thing, but they weren't around ten years ago."

When the rally ended, the guys packed up their gear and we found ourselves at a place called Ivy Noodle talking shop. "It's pretty ironic you're sitting here with us right now." Jenkins said around a mouthful of rice noodles. "I got turned onto the Xplorer from Zed who heard about it from you, and it's been a pretty useful piece of gear over the past 10 years. I used it for everything from doing basic service checks on radios to quick and dirty bug detection." The Xplorer was a pretty sophisticated unit that still holds its own today. It had 30 MHz. to 2 Ghz. coverage (minus cellular). It decoded CTCSS, DCS, DTMF, and LTR signaling. It could even lock of specific annoying frequencies and be set to only scan certain frequency ranges (blocks). It also had full computer control. This full feature set was pretty much unheard of with scanners back in the late 1990s. The advent of Signal Stalker and Close Call scanners starting at \$100 has made the Xplorer a little pricey for today's hobbyists. For less than the cost of a Xplorer you can get a scanner that has near-field, P25, trunktracking, CTCSS/DCS decoding, and computer control capabilities with the same frequency coverage. That is not to say that you might find one used at a reasonable price, especially if it has a spent battery pack that only needs to be replaced. In that case, you might want to consider this classic piece of near-field receiving gear.

The Story of Johnny Hack - Part 2

After Johnny's boss discovered his skill with phones and computers, he wasn't doing much in the way of cleaning and was making more money. After fixing the restaurant's computer and installing a new phone line for the credit card machine, Johnny developed a web site for his boss advertising the restaurant and allowing it to accept take-out orders over the Internet. Johnny also helped his boss install a stand-alone ATM machine in the front of the restaurant so customers would have a ready source of cash. All of these helped improve his boss' bottom line and Johnny's paycheck improved greatly. This was a good thing, as Johnny's hobby was beginning to cost more money as he sought specialty items that couldn't be found at his usual sources.

The end of the summer was approaching quickly, and Johnny wanted to engage in a major war-dialing effort around Labor Day to find local telco test numbers. Not wanting to repeat the performance of certain acquaintances who were stupid enough to war-dial at home, Johnny embarked on a sophisticated effort to use phone numbers which were not traceable to him. By listening to cordless phones in his neighborhood, he was able to find a residence that would be unoccupied for a period of time and had flat rate phone service. His plan was to hook up a cordless phone modified for extended range to the demarc point, and use that to safely war-dial from the comfort of his own bedroom without a trace. He had already purchased a phone book CD and used the residential listings to form a "don't call" list, and discovered what numbers in an exchange were potentially used for telco test functions by putting a local b-box under video surveillance.

Johnny's initial experiments with the cordless phone were unsuccessful as the phone didn't have enough range. He ordered an antenna off the net which would improve the range. His research however told him that the antenna cable (coax) available at Radio Shack would not be good enough for the antenna, as it suffered too much signal loss at 900 MHz. He found an electronics supply house in the city about an hour away that should have what he was looking for. Now that he had saved up some more cash, he was going to take a day off and visit the city. He picked the first Friday of the month as the city was host to a 2600 meeting. He wasn't impressed the first time he went, but that was a year ago so maybe things had changed. Besides, there was one person who he'd like to meet there: The Critic.

The Critic was an old-school hacker from way back. He originally had another handle, but his postings debunking on line technical accuracies and making fun of hackers who were caught while offering security suggestions quickly earned him his new handle which he proudly adopted. The Critic was a “tourist” type hacker. He hacked computer systems for the challenge and adrenaline rush. Once in, he'd leave his trademark, a drawing of the two actors masks, tragedy and comedy, along with a critique on how to improve security for the system, and never log back on again. Despite being mentioned in several magazine articles of that era on hacking, he was never caught. No one knew who he was or where he came from, but legend said he would find promising novice hackers and teach them how to hack. When 2600 meetings started, he would post acerbic critiques of the stupidity he observed at them. Pictures of 2600 meeting attendees would surface on Usenet and in all of them the same drawing. Some people thought he was a computer scientist. Others thought he was a cab driver. The rumors flew like pigeons in the shadow of a hawk, but no one knew anything certain. Or if they did they kept quiet about it. Johnny would like to meet The Critic, as he thought he could learn a lot from him.

Shouldering his backpack, Johnny took the train down to the city. There were a few places he wanted to visit before the meeting, written down in a fresh notepad he brought with him for the occasion. His first stop was at an electronics store he found on the Web. The first thing he did upon entering was grab every parts catalog and piece of test equipment literature he could get. They would at least be good reference material. He needed some microwave-rated coax and connectors for his 900 MHz. cordless phone antenna, and the store had what he was looking for. He then browsed the test equipment section, although he was a little short of cash to afford anything there. With catalogs and product literature in hand however, he might be able to evaluate what he needed and return when he managed to save enough money. Johnny thought that it would be cool find an old-school hardware hacker who could help him out with test equipment advice, as he surmised that some models would be better suited for his applications.

Finally he went over to the book section looking for the one item that he knew from reading various old-school hacker blogs was the number one source for hobbyist RF info. One of the store owners was a ham radio operator who made sure the book selection was properly stocked and in no time at all Johnny found a copy of The ARRL Handbook for Radio Communications. The thing was the size of a bible, for that's what it was. Johnny wasn't sure about getting

his ham ticket yet. The hacker scene ran about 50/50 for and against it, although he felt that those in favor gave better reasons for having it than those who were against gave for not. He thought it might give him a better chance for finding a tech job with a small business. As Johnny went to pay for his purchases, the owner asked him “Are you a ham operator, son?” Johnny replied “No sir. The cable is for my Wifi router's antenna.” The man's response was friendly, “A hacker then, eh? That's a start at least! I remember when they came out with that Timex Sinclair for a hundred bucks. Had to get one and then got a Commodore 64 later for BBS systems and packet. Packet was how computers did wireless before Wifi, but that's all in that ARRL handbook you got there. Now there's all sorts of computer stuff in the hobby” Johnny nodded politely, paid for his purchases and thanked the man. As the owner gave Johnny his change he said, “Get your ham ticket! You'll learn a lot, have a lot of fun, and it could help you find a good job in the future.” When he left, he noticed the owner had given him a discount on the ARRL Handbook.

Johnny was planning on going to the big bookstore that was in the city in the hopes of finding some different technical books and magazines, and had allocated some of his funds for this purpose. That was until he saw the Army/Navy store on his way there. Johnny knew a few hackers and phone phreaks of a certain slant were into Army/Navy stores, so he decided on a whim to check it out. The first thing he noticed were the stacks of green ammo cans in various sizes. He read on a site belonging to a hacker group called “GBPPR” that ammo cans were great for electronic projects that were to be used outdoors. Seeing that they were cheap and waterproof he figured they might be good for a few things he was working on, but they were a little bulky to buy and carry around the city. Johnny wondered if there was an Army/Navy store closer to where he lived. Going through the clothing section he picked up a pair of black BDU pants and decided they looked good and would replace a pair of jeans that were getting a little on the worn-side. Johnny walked through the aisles of surplus field gear and found a small, but very interesting book section. A few minutes later his book fund was all spent. Going to the counter to pay for his purchases, he saw a little SwissTech micro-tool that fitted on a keyring. Johnny had a nice Letherman Tool he bought with some birthday gift money, but was loath to carry it in school because of their asinine “no weapons” policy that included everything with a knife blade. The SwissTech tool would go unnoticed and let him always have a pair of pliers and some screwdrivers handy.

After leaving the Army/navy store, Johnny checked the time and figured people would already be at the meeting. The 2600 meeting was located in the lower level in a public atrium of an office building. The first thing Johnny noticed was that people on the upper level could sit at a table and be able to watch the whole meeting unnoticed by the meeting attendees. That struck him as unwise, and was the first thing he did after grabbing a soda at the the atrium's deli. Johnny sat down at a convenient table, drank his soda, and watched the attendees. Just like when he last visited the meeting a year ago, their appearance, mannerisms, and attitude had not changed a bit. Johnny finished his soda, and was about to get up when he noticed the drawing on table below him. The gentleman at the table was undistinguished looking, the sort of person who would disappear in a crowd. He was discretely taking pictures of the entertainment at the meeting, while keeping the drawing of the actors masks in the picture. Johnny walked up to him, sat at his table, and said "You're The Critic." The Critic replied "And you are?". Johnny wasn't too sure how to reply, so he used his handle, "I'm the Titanium Ferret." "Is that kind of like a modern 'Stainless Steel Rat'? You look like you could be his son, actually. Why aren't you down there with the rest of the 'hackers'?" Johnny was a lot quicker and confident this time. "Look at them. They look lame. I was watching from up there, and saw the drawing that appears on the pictures you take. So I came down to meet you." The Titanium Ferret and The Critic stayed and watched the 2600 meeting for a bit longer while The Critic finished taking his pictures. They got up to leave, and The Critic asked Johnny if he had eaten dinner yet. When Johnny replied in the negative, The Critic asked him if he'd like to dine with some friends. They left the atrium, and walked out to The Critic's vehicle, where Johnny learned what The Critic did for a living. They got into the taxicab, and drove to a nondescript diner where Johnny discovered the real hacker meeting was every month. While driving down the road, Johnny asked The Critic why he was a cab driver. "I'm actually retired. This just gives me something to do to keep from getting bored, and is good for finding out a lot of good inside info for the hobby. You'd be amazed what two executives will talk about in the back of a cab because they think it's safe. After all, what threat is a dumb high school drop-out cabbie?" The Critic said with a laugh. "What did you do before you retired?" was Johnny's next question. "Oh, this and that."

They soon pulled up to a nondescript looking diner. As they got out of the car, The Critic sensing Johnny's apprehension about their meal location tells him "It may look like a hole in the wall, but they have the best veal marsalla in

the city. Prices are good too." They walked in and went to the back of the building, where a small group of very ordinary looking guys were seated. The youngest, a guy in his thirties, spoke first. "Hey Critic, who's the newcomer?" Johnny now feeling even braver spoke up, "I'm The Titanium Ferret." After saying that, he felt a little foolish to be using his handle, but the fellow hacker said "Cool. I'm The Ghost." The other's at the table introduced themselves, and soon Johnny met Joshua Tower, Agent 1633, The Phantom, R.F. Burns, and The Omega Man. After getting settled in and ordering food, Agent 1633, or "Agent" to his friends explained the meeting to Johnny. "Back in the 1970s and 80s there was this phone phreak magazine called 'TAP'. The guys who put it out used to get together every Friday night for beer and onion rings. The magazine died, but some of the former readers and writers still got together Friday nights. Some people moved away and we changed locations a few times over the years, but we still have the meetings. " Dinner came, and soon afterwards everyone was talking about their favorite technical subjects over coffee and dessert. Johnny was asked what he was working on, if anything, and he pulled out one of the books he purchased that day. When R.F. Burns saw it, he said "You were at Grandpa's. Next time you're there tell him your a member of TAP. " Then he saw the receipt and laughed. "Looks like he already gave you the discount."

Johnny spent most of the night listening and writing down everything he could catch. He wasn't the only one busy with notebook and pen. Soon it was almost Midnight, and the group called it a night. The Critic gave Johnny a ride to the train station, and as Johnny was exiting the vehicle handed him a business card. On it was a phone number, another sequence of six digits, and two words. "Here is where we hang out." he said "Have a safe trip home and see you next month." Johnny had about a half an hour before his train left, so he went looking for a pay phone. He had a prepaid phone card that still had some time on it, so he called the number. It picked up and was silent. He then keyed in the six digit sequence and was greeted by a modem carrier. "Interesting." he thought. Johnny spent the train ride home going through his notebook and reading his latest book acquisitions. By the time the cab dropped him off, he was dead tired and decided to crash for the night. He still had a full weekend ahead of him.

Stealth Tools

When I was in High School, I worked part time as an electronic technician in a TV repair shop. The Leatherman Tool wasn't invented yet, but I had the Swiss Army Knife I carried ever since joining the Boy Scouts. An assortment of other tools such as a small pair of Vise-Grips and a set of Allen Wrenches always rode in my backpack. Back then my school didn't even consider a Swiss Army Knife to be enough of a knife to warrant any attention. We were a rural area just turning suburban. Many students and faculty sported a Buck folding knife on their belts. In shop classes you felt somewhat conspicuous without one. That was twenty years ago, and today we live in less enlightened times. Kids are getting expelled for bringing in plastic butter knives to spread jelly or butter on their breakfast toast!

In many educational institutions, and other places, the carrying of a multi-tool is forbidden because of the knife blade(s) they have on them. While I can go into the reasons why in many instances this policy is foolish and wrong, I will instead offer a potential solution for my fellow travelers. There exist several makes and models of inexpensive “mini tools” that fit on a key ring. Many of them are simply plier/wire cutter and screwdriver combinations that have no knife blades on them. Unless a particular place is especially despotic about what they allow inside their walls, these implements will enable you to always have access to some basic essential tools should the need arise.



In the picture at the left are three such mini-tools along with a US Quarter coin for size reference. The tool on the left is a Swiss-Tech mini-plier tool available for \$10 in the automotive department at the Target department store chain. It features two different sizes of slotted and Phillips screwdrivers, wire cutters, and a pair of pliers. The center tool is a Swiss-Tech Utili-Key also available at Target. It has some

small screwdrivers, a bottle opener, and a 1.5 inch knife blade. It is very likely that this one could be mistaken for a key on a key ring, and in some instances the knife blade may be small enough to not be considered a weapon. On the right we have an inexpensive yet good quality generic mini-plier tool available at many hardware and auto parts stores. This one has a different plier design than the Swiss-Tech model, and only two screwdrivers, but is still enough to deal with many repair situations.



Here are the tools on a key ring among some keys. It is unlikely that you would be sporting all three tools, but as you see one of pliers and the Utili-Key would add minimal weight to your key ring and offer up a discrete appearance.

Ever since they came out in the early 1990s, I have been a big fan of multi-tools such as the Leatherman Tool and Gerber Multi-Pliers. However, they may be a bit expensive for the individual on a budget who is looking for a small pocket-sized tool chest. One evening, while working on this article my gaze fell upon the small stockpile of mint tins every techie keeps handy for when they need a small project box. I wondered how many small tools a budget-minded fellow traveler would be able to fit in one to

make a pocket-sized tool-kit.



Here is the picture of the Mini-Mint Tool Tin with all its tools packed inside. At my spouse's suggestion, the tissue paper was added to keep everything from rattling around inside. Based on our judgments, weight of the completed kit didn't seem much heavier than when it was filled with its original

contents.



This Mini-Mint Tool Tin fits in a pocket, and is robust enough to help with situations you might encounter during your travels that can be fixed with a multi-tool. The contents of the kit consist of a small and medium Swiss Army Knife that was sold together as a “value pack” purchased at a local flea market, the two Swiss-Tech tools, and the other mini-plier tool. This kit offers a few different sizes of knife blades, two different styles of pliers, an awl, scissors, wire cutters, various sizes of slotted and Phillips screwdrivers, can and bottle openers, a corkscrew, file, and tweezers. Total cost of the kit was about half the price of a brand-name multi-tool with similar functionality.



If you don't know what PGP or SIMP is, don't bother applying.
On the other hand, if you think that "hacker" means anarchy, cracking, chipping, encryption, and reverse engineering, then we want to talk to you.

If you are interested in becoming a part of the IIRG and have an inquisitive mind and have knowledge in electronics, then we have an opportunity for you.

We are also looking for graphic artists and writers for Phantasy.

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Send your PGP key to: iirg@yahoo.com

We will respond with our key and an encrypted message with further instructions.

<http://www.iirg.net/>

When Autumn Leaves Fall

by Andrew Zarowny

<http://members.tripod.com/~AZarowny/>

Chapter 1: Anatomy of a Pack-Rat

Larry Stewart was born in Detroit, Michigan, April 14th, 1962. His father, Michael, worked at Dodge Main on the assembly line. Larry's mother, Carol, was a housewife, raising Larry and his two older brothers, and three years later, a younger sister. From early on, Larry showed great aptitude for working with his mind and hands. Building blocks, Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, etc..., were always fully utilized during playtime.

Summers were often spent on his Uncle Pete's farm in Ubly, about in the middle of Michigan's Thumb region. The whole family spent a lot of time there during the summer of 1967, when Detroit had it's quota of riots which plagued the cities in the 1960's. Larry was both scared and excited. He could sense the concern his parents had. But he was also awe-struck watching the deployment of the military to squelch the rioters. Needless to say, the event made a lasting impression on him.

Larry was also impressed in those days with America's race into space. He found the whole concept of rocketing off to distant planets appealing. Larry's curiosity was enhanced by this, and he learned to read quickly. Much of his free time was spent in a local library. At the age of eight, his Uncle Pete gave Larry a small telescope kit his he had purchased from a mail order company that specialized in selling scientific equipment and surplus materials. It was just a simple refractor telescope, consisting of two tubes of sturdy cardboard and two plastic caps with glass lenses attached in them. The device only took a few minutes to assemble. Larry could focus it by moving one tube in or out of the other. While not very powerful, it nourished a desire for learning more about the nature of the universe.

Building things became second nature to Larry. He soon entered his plastic model building phase. After awhile, he became quite good at it, especially once he learned that patience would be rewarded. His models were always the best built and painted of all his contemporaries. Cars, planes, ships, and military vehicles soon filled his room, and then the basement and even the

garage. His parents wanted Larry to get rid of some before he bought anymore. It was when his mother decided to sell some of her needle work that Larry decided to join her at the local church rummage sale. Along side his mother's crafts, Larry brought a box of models. They were a success. Those he didn't sell for cash, he swapped for comic books and trading cards.

By the age of twelve, Larry was not only earning money from mowing lawns, shoveling snow, and delivering newspapers, but he also began dealing in various collectibles. He'd buy a box of old comic books for a dollar at a garage sale and quickly turn around and resell them to collectors at a tidy profit. Good old Uncle Pete had given him a starter coin collecting set for Christmas and Larry also began following that path as well. When it became legal to own gold again late in 1974, Larry was there with cash to buy some. Along with junk silver coins from before 1965, Larry was on his way to accumulating a nice little stash of cash.

When Larry turned sixteen, like all of that age, he wanted to begin driving a car. He had already learned two summers ago on Uncle Pete's farm. Naturally, Larry just didn't want to just drive, but wanted to buy his own car to drive. He had enough money to purchase one. His father went car hunting with Larry, who had made a list from the used car ads in the newspapers. He settled on buying a 1966 Plymouth Sport Fury with a 318 cubic inch engine.

Thus, Larry entered his backyard mechanic phase. Not only maintaining his vehicle, but improving and modifying it as well. His father had long before included Larry in the work done on the family cars. Larry also helped out when his older brothers work on their cars, not to mention helping Uncle Pete work on his truck and tractor on the farm. Larry made a great shave-tail mechanic. He could tune an engine just with his ear. Diagnosing problems came easily. His friends always called him up when they had trouble. Larry was all too happy to help, especially when he was paid for his labors.

Unfortunately, hard times were about to fall on the family. The economy was in bad shape. The U.S. automobile industry was getting clobbered by imports. Factories were closing and workers were laid off. To make matters worse, the value of money was shrinking by a period of severe inflation. This affected the Stewart family. Larry's father was occasionally laid off from work. His mother was now working part-time as a waitress to help pay the bills.

Larry's own hope for going to a major university now looked grim. Although his grades were good enough for getting some help in both grants and scholarships, it still wouldn't be enough. Even just going to a local community college meant Larry had to sell off some of his horde of gold and silver, both which had increased substantially in value. Larry did not want to burden the family. In fact, he wanted to pitch in and help as much as he could.

Larry decided to take a course for an associates degree as an electronics technician at the community college. He sold off some of his cache of goods and also got himself a job in a small factory. Working days and going to school at night was a hard regiment to maintain. But both school and work came easy to Larry. Within a few months, after learning how to operate every type of machine in the factory, Larry was offered a position as assistant repairman. Working on lathes, surface grinders, and other machines, Larry quickly became a highly prized employee, and began earning some decent money.

Still living at home, Larry was able to save a good deal of his income, even while paying for school and contributing to the family coffers. This really came in handy when his sister Alice needed braces for her teeth. By 1982, the economy started to improve. Larry's father was working full time again. When Larry finished school, he quickly got a job for a major supplier to the auto industry repairing their new computer-controlled machine tools. But while he began making more money, he also began paying higher taxes. Larry soon began to develop politically.

Several influences began converging all at once. Larry's new girlfriend, Nancy Parker, was active in the Libertarian Party. Much of this was due to the fact that Nancy liked to smoke marijuana and saw no reason why it shouldn't be legalized, sold, and even taxed, just like alcohol and tobacco. Larry began attending meetings with her. As it turned out, Michigan had a large number of party members. Larry quickly accepted much of the party's platforms and basic premise that there wasn't a dime's bit of difference between the Democrats and Republicans, or Republicrats as they were referred to by the Libertarians.

Another influence that began shaping Larry's politics, and his mind, was a local talk radio host. He had always listened to music stations on the radio, until he happened across this dramatic, and enthusiastic voice arguing with a caller about taxation. The host, Scott Sharp, began screaming at the caller, saying things like, "Your head is firmly suspended in the fog of the unknown"

and "You need an epistemological house cleaning". Scott Sharp then began talking about an author by the name of Ayn Rand and several of the books she had written. Larry stopped off at a bookstore that very day and bought copies of "Atlas Shrugged" and "The Fountainhead". Later, he furthered his introduction into the philosophy of Objectivism by reading Rand's non-fiction works, like "For The New Intellectual", "The Virtue Of Selfishness", and "Philosophy: Who Needs It".

Within a few months, Larry became one of the bright stars at the local Libertarian gatherings. His grasp of the subject matter, the way he presented his arguments, all impressed the others, including Nancy. Many in the group were becoming involved in the Tax-Protest movement. A few had stopped filing and were jailed. This is when Larry began to question the whole approach. If they were to engage in a struggle against tyranny, there had to be a more effective, and less legally dangerous way to do so.

At this time, one last piece of the puzzle fell into place. The Cold War seemed to get hotter, especially when President Reagan proposed his Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars program as the media dubbed it. There was more talk now about 'First-Strike' weapons, and some military strategists began talking about fighting limited-scale nuclear wars.

Larry now became acquainted with a new term for his vocabulary, 'Survivalist'. He had seen a fellow on TV who published a monthly newspaper on survivalism. This chap also sold books that contained a wide range of how-to manuals and articles from the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. There were also books about improvised weaponry, too. Larry bought these and began subscribing to the newspaper.

For the most part, the common image of survivalists was that of overgrown Boy Scouts armed to the teeth with secret hide-outs in 'them-thar-hills' with stockpiles of dehydrated food to last for two or more years. However, the personage from whom Larry had been buying books from had a different approach. This message was one of living a modest, self-sufficient lifestyle. Relocating to a small rural community, learning a marketable skill and setting up a small business that would benefit the community. Instead of hiding out in a bunker, you establish good relations with your neighbors and learn to cooperate with each other.

This made a lot of sense to Larry. The message was one very positive and constructive, not one of fear and paranoia. He began to seriously consider following this advice. The challenge of being self-sufficient appealed to him. It peaked his curiosity. Just how far could he push himself, depend upon himself. Could he achieve a high degree of freedom and independence?

What's more, could this be a better way to oppose tyranny, by disengaging himself as much as possible from 'The System'? The more he could do by himself, the more he could utilize his resources to their limits, the less income he would need to survive. The less income earned, the less taxes he'd have to pay. In Ayn Rand's novel, "Atlas Shrugged", the hero, John Galt, rebelled against 'The System' by leading a strike of the mind. Galt convinced other productive people to stop their contributions to society at large. To close their businesses, to work menial jobs instead of giving their all and deny society the products of their creativity and industry.

This message seemed to be a sound method to Larry of how best to oppose tyranny. Rather than taking the sword of violence, Galt and his followers waged a basically peaceful, economic war against 'The Looters' of the world. As their numbers grew, there were hardships felt by all. There were consequences to their actions. Galt's people deliberately worked towards crashing 'The System', stopping 'the motor of the world'.

Larry soon realized that while the Libertarians may have a good message, it was not catching on and would not work by itself to stop bad government. The Tax-Protesters were also a dead-end. All they would accomplish was to set themselves up to be run-over by the juggernaut of The Law. Larry now decided that his path was clear. He would follow John Galt. By utilizing the concepts embraced by survivalism, he would lessen his dependence on money. Larry would voluntarily earn less and pay less. He became a soldier in the struggle between the individual and the collective. And he would do so by becoming a peasant, a modern day serf, who's only lord was He who blessed Larry with an active mind and a yearning for freedom.

Chapter Two: A Serf Is Born!

The first big decision for Larry, where to relocate, was the easiest one to make. Huron County, in Michigan's Thumb area. Uncle Pete and his family brood were already living there. Cousin Chuck was a Sheriff's deputy, and cousin Jim was a county commissioner. In addition to already having family there, and having spent a good deal of time in the area, Larry also knew that the region had a diversified agricultural base. Corn and navy beans were primary crops. Vegetable protein and carbohydrates. Sugar beets were also popular. This meant that Larry did not need a large plot of land, since he could obtain these crops from the local farmers. All Larry would really need to do was have a basic garden and some fruit trees.

Memorial Day weekend in 1986 was when Larry drove up to his Uncle's place to discuss his relocation with him. Uncle Pete was happy at the prospect of Larry moving there. Pete's children had no interest in continuing the family farm. Over the past few years, Pete had sold off some of the land, and had reduced the size from over 850 acres down to 160 acres. This was about as much as Pete could manage.

Larry explained that he was interested in buying about 3-5 acres with a house already on it. Pete suggested that they drive into Bad Axe, the largest town in Huron County, and check out a realtor. Actually, they wound up first stopping off at an IGA grocery store. There, they obtained realty buying guides for free. Most of the listings included a photo of the property for sale.

Uncle Pete already had in mind a few prospects for Larry, but chose to remain quiet about them. To no surprise to Pete, the listings that Larry put on his 'A' list were the very ones Pete knew of. On Sunday, after church, Larry, with Uncle Pete and his wife Jan, drove by 3 of the prospects. Larry checked out 2 others on Monday before returning to Detroit. He had made arrangements to return the following weekend.

One of Larry's life-long friends, Al Beecher, was a rough carpenter. Building homes and garages were his specialty. Al was also an avid hunter and fisherman. Larry contacted him during the week and asked for his help in checking out the homes. Al agreed, especially after Larry mentioned the good fishing in an old gravel pit on his Uncle's farm. They would leave Friday night, so they could get some fishing in first thing Saturday morning.

The fish were biting, putting Al in a good mood. Uncle Pete came along after doing some chores, and described the good deer hunting in the area. Al

now had an open invitation for both fishing and for deer hunting in the Fall. After a fish fry for lunch, Larry and Al set out on the road to examine the houses that Larry was considering buying. Al's trained eye really helped for speedy, but efficient inspections.

By mid-week, Larry had made up his mind and placed a call to the real estate agent for one of the prospects. A four bedroom home on five acres with a barn and two sheds. The rest of the farm had been sold off long ago, but there was still plenty of ariable land for Larry's needs. There were even some fruit trees, mostly apples and plums. Larry had taken water samples from each of the sites, and the lab-work showed that the well water from this one was the best. Quite a bit harder than city-water, but softer than the others.

Fortunately, thanks to Uncle Pete's inside knowledge, Larry knew that the site had been on the market for over a year. The asking price was only \$56,000, but Larry made an offer of \$35,000 and to his happy surprise, it was accepted. He would have to pay for the back taxes, but that only amounted to another \$1,200. Larry paid half in cash and took out a mortgage on the rest. Monthly payments were only \$220, which was no big deal.

The home was about six miles north east from Uncle Pete's place. Just down the road as they say. Pete was good friends with Larry's new neighbors and took care of the introductions. By the end of June, the paperwork had been completed, the loan approved, and Larry was now a property owner. On the July 4th weekend, Larry began the long task of moving in and setting up shop.

With help from friends and his new neighbors, Larry had the place livable in just a few weeks. He did not plan on moving in permanently till next year. Till then, every Friday night, he'd drive up from Detroit, spend the weekend working, then drive back down Sunday night. By September, all the rooms had a fresh coat of paint, all the pumbling worked, and the house was ready for winter. Larry bought a ton of corn and beans for \$200 from one of his neighbors. He repacked it all in one gallon plastic baggies. This was time consuming, but necessary to prevent weevils from ruining his supply. The farmer suggested adding bayleaf to each bag. He swore this would kill the weevils. It must of worked, since few of the bags were infested.

During the fall and winter, Larry dealt with the eletrical wiring and putting up shelves in the basement, sheds, and two of the spare bedrooms. Al, and a few other friends were his first house guests. They came up for deer hunting season. It was a great time for them all as each got a buck. Most of the local farmers permitted Larry and company to hunt on their land. Several of

them had fishing holes like that of Uncle Pete's and ice fishing expeditions were made during the winter. Al himself began thinking seriously about buying a cottage nearby. Uncle Pete offered Al two acres for a grand and said he could either build a house there or just get himself a trailer home. Al knew of a trailer home for sale for just \$5,000 that was in decent shape. Moving it up there by a professional mover would run about \$750. Pete said that the land he would sell already had a well dug for irrigation. Al took the plunge and shook hands with Pete.

Spring of 1986 was a busy time for Larry. He took a three month leave of absence from work. First thing was getting his garden planted. Larry borrowed his Uncle's tractor and tilled an small plot behind the home. He planted just about every kind of vegetable you can think of. One of his neighbors offered some raspberry bushes as a house warming present. Larry also tilled several small plots in which he planted a variety of dwarf fruit trees. These cost a bit more than standard size, but still, for about \$600, he had a nice stand of peach and apple trees.

Larry's garden followed the method of high-density planting as spelled out in Mel Barthollemew's "Square Foot Gardening" book. This was a high efficiency which required less water and weeding than conventional row gardens. A few 4ft. x 4ft. plots provided enough produce to have a fresh salad everyday. Raised bed gardens were better, so Larry modified the method by using old tires instead of building frames out of wood as described in the book. Detroit was full of used tires, and Larry brought a truck-load everytime he came up from the city.

He prepared each tire by first drilling a hole as close to the tread as possible on the sidewall using a 1/4 inch drill bit. Larry then used that guide-hole for sticking in his sabre saw and then proceeded to cut away the sidewall. After doing this on both sides, he then turned the tire inside out and gave it a thorough washing. The tires were then lined up over the tilled soil. Each tire was then filled with a mixture of one-third compost, peat moss, and manure. He then watered each and let them sit overnight before planting his seeds.

Following Barthollemew's formulas, Larry planted his crops. He had a mixture of both vegetables and flowers. Larry had read that many plants mutually support one another, such as marigolds and tomatoes. Larry used larger tires for growing potatoes and for planting his dwarf fruit trees. Here, again, Larry had read that raising dwarf trees densely arranged was more efficient than conventional orchards. Keeping them in small groupings meant

that Larry could use a single fine mesh net to cover a whole stand and protect them from birds. A large sheet of plastic could be used to cover them when it was necessary to spray fertilizer or pesticides.

Over the next few weeks, Larry got a lot accomplished. He hit many yard and garage sales, both there and on his biweekly returns to Detroit, buying all sorts of goodies for dirt cheap. He really hit paydirt one weekend when he came across a yuppy selling her deceased mother's canning supplies. About a hundred jars with lids and rubber seals, plus even a large stainless steel pressure cooker. Larry offered \$100 for the whole kit and kaboodle.

As things started to shape up, Larry began checking out the job scene in the area. It was pretty bleak. There were a few small machinshops here and there, plus repairshops for cars, boats, farm vehicles, and appliances. Larry dropped off resumes with the machinshops. The owners and managers at them explained that they could not hire him full-time, especially at the salary he was making in Detroit. Larry told them that he'd work when they needed him, provided that they supply all the technical manuals to him for the equipment ahead of time. Some agreed and Larry began building a nice library.

As the end of his leave of absence drew near, Larry had a big choice to make. Hire someone to mind his garden for him during the week, or just quit now and relocate permanently? Live a simple, quiet life with clean air and no crime, or continue to divide his time and efforts in both locations? The choice was easy. Larry went back and gave notice. He never looked back since.

Chapter 3: Poor Man's John Galt

Now that Larry had quit his job, he set about the business of living and working full-time on his '5-acres-of-happiness'. He still had a few grand in the bank, plus a whole bunch of collectables that he could unload. But more importantly, he had skills that his new found neighbors and community could use. Even though it would mean making less money than Larry would have made doing the same in Metro-Detroit, it would be enough to pay the bills. His only real expenses were the mortgage, taxes, and basic utilities. This tallied up to be just over \$300 a month. Larry was confident he could earn that.

The two primary industries in the area were agriculture and the vacation-recreation trade. This was mainly seasonal work. Larry knew from talking with Uncle Pete, that winters were deads-ville. "If you're gonna make money here, you got to do it between April and October.", his Uncle warned. Larry had some basic business cards made up, with just his name, address, and

phone number on them. He promoted himself as a 'all-around-Mr.Fix-It'.

Things started to happen after the July 4th weekend. Plenty of the transient vacationers needed work done around their cottages. With Huron County bordered on three sides by Lake Huron, one of the Great Lakes, there were plenty of people who could repair cars, marine engines, and household appliances. Most people closed their cottages up during the winter and this meant preparing the home by draining the plumbing and other winter-izing procedures.

Larry had taken out a small ad in the local paper and started to get some business shortly there after. At first, it was just fix a TV or an engine. He got a few inquiries about doing landscaping, mainly mowing lawns for people who only came up on weekends and didn't want to be bothered with such menial tasks. Larry had no problem with that. Five bucks here, twenty there, it started to add up.

One of the local machinshops called and informed him that one of their surface grinders had broken down. Larry was there in an hour and had it up and running before the end of the day. He charged \$200 and got it. He fixed a neighbor's lathe and was paid with a half dozen chickens. Larry bought another dozen and a rooster.

By the mid-1990's, Larry had a decent trade going. He earned more than enough to pay his bills and buy a few goodies once in awhile. More often than not, he found goodies, too. On slow months, late fall through winter, Larry would drive down to Detroit for a bit of foraging. They had begun the practice of having their garbage picked up in front of the house as opposed to in back-alley dumpsters. Once a month, the city would pick-up trash too big for the small 70 gallon personal trashbins each home was issued.

Larry couldn't believe the stuff people threw away! He got all sorts of lawn mowers and snow blowers that only needed minor repairs to be made functional again. Old TVs, water heaters, and plenty of furniture, too. Larry had to be a bit choosy since he only had a Ford F-100 to fill. He soon developed a keen eye for junk, and knew what could be salvaged and resold and what couldn't. One day, he even scored a 12 ft. TV satellite dish! Larry stopped off at a surplus electronics store he knew of and picked up a controller and signal converter for \$75.

Larry's garden was steadily getting bigger and better, too. He added a small greenhouse along the southside of the house. This kept the home warm in

the winter and cool in the summer. Following instructions in one of his how-to books, Larry built a windmill using the rear axle and yoke from an car. He got a surplus generator and was soon making enough of his own electricity that he was actually being paid a little bit each month by the power company. There was always a decent breeze.

Larry's barnyard started to really shape up with the addition of dairy goats, again, obtained in barter for services rendered, and by his little fish farm. Larry read an article on how to raise fish in 55 gallon drums. It seemed like a good idea to him, and didn't cost much since he got most of the materials either for free or cheap. Each drum unit wound up costing maybe \$25, and he got fingerings for free from a state fish hatchery. A worm farm cost about \$20 and soon produced more than enough food for his aqua-farm. His neighbors really got a kick when they'd see him fishing from his back porch!

His resale business from Larry's foraging excursions got so good that he needed help. Fortunately, the sherrif had a brother who seemed to have trouble holding down a job. Bobby was a slacker, who didn't mind working as long as he could have a nip now and then on the job. Larry made his day when he showed Bobby how to make a samll still from odds and ends and use it for turning cheap wine into high-octane brandy. Bobby soon began accompanying Larry on his forays into Detroit and lent a hand on weekends with a road-side yard sale.

This association was a very profitable one. Larry already had a cousin for a deputy. Now, with Bobby, Larry had the inside track as far as law enforcement went. When the county decided to fund the conversion of the department's .38 Specials to Glock 9mm, Larry got a deal on one of the surplus revolvers. For \$200, he got the gun, a belt & holster, cleaning kit, and 500 rounds to boot. He also began to become good friends with many on the department. They threw business his way, repairing appliances and such, and would often stop by for some of that high-octane brew.

Over the years, Larry became well known as a can-do kind of guy. He had a talent for breathing new life into refuse. Either restoring it to working condition, or modifying it for a whole new purpose. He sometimes drew confused stares when discussing politics. Larry had long ago started listening to various programs on shortwave radio. Many of these were supportive of the 'patriot' or 'militia' movement. Quite a few locals were also involved in these. They didn't trust the government and were all concerned about the decline in values and percieved freedoms.

But Larry, while sympathetic, had a different perspective. He saw tyranny as a function of the Establishment, for the sole purpose of maintaining their powerbase. The System was set up and run to support them. But while the original founders may have been intelligent, even benevolent people, such as America's founding fathers, Larry had no doubts that the current crop of rulers were a few rungs down the ladder from their ancestors. Having read works like Elmer Pendel's "Why Civilizations Self-Destruct", Larry knew that with each new generation, the quality of leadership would decline. For that matter, the quality of subjects would decline as well.

When Larry would voice his opinions that there was no political solution to the problems at hand, and that it would be better just to let The System crash and start over, he earned some mean looks and arguments. But Larry was well read and with his active mind, could defend his position. When the patriot-types would argue about restoring the original intent of the Constitution, Larry quoted Lysander Spooner. "If the Constitution isn't the cause of our current problems, it certainly has failed in preventing them."

Larry suggested that there were intrinsic flaws in the constitution. Afterall, he would declare, it's authors were just men, not gods nor angels. He pointed out that all through history, whenever the power to tax and spend were given to a single body of government, as the U.S. Congress has, tyranny would soon follow. "The Constitution has a lot of good ideas and was an extraordinary document for it's time. But it had flaws and needs to be modified."

Larry put forth his belief that by remaining part of The System, people were supporting it and the tyranny it caused. He told his neighbors that he was not a violent man, and chose not to fight tyranny in that manner, but instead to confront it economically. Denying it the sweat of his brow and the ingenuity of his mind. He would just do the minimum of what was expected, and no more. At least, until The System crashed. Then, afterwards, Larry had an idea or two for how society should be organized.

Chapter Four: Stormy Skies

On Larry's scavenger hunts into the city, he always stopped off at a 'greasey-spoon' diner called 'Kay's Grill'. After feeding the animals, he would time his departure as to arrive in the city after the morning rush hour. Kay's Grill was a nice little diner with cheap food. Only \$1.99 got you two eggs - any style, two strips of bacon, hash browns, toast, and coffee with free refills.

It was here that Larry met Ann Konopski. She was in her mid-thirties, divorced, with one son, Adam, now fourteen. She had been around the block, and not much worse for wear. As a waitress, she was always being hit upon by the customers. But Larry never did, and it wasn't long before she and he would become friends. She trusted Larry, even though she didn't understand him most of the time.

Ann had long since stopped dreaming of being wealthy, even though she did still play the lottery. She was also on the verge of giving up on love and happiness, till she met Larry. Ann was hard working, had few illusions, and was a fine figure of a woman, in Larry's mind. He would never mention it, but one thing that attracted him to her was her large skeletal frame. He knew that she had strength, and the wide hips meant she'd be a good 'birther'.

It was a long distance relationship when they did start dating. After a few months, Ann's car was car-jacked. Fortunately, all that happened was the car was stolen. But this put such fear in her, that she would hardly leave the house for several weeks. Larry spent what time he could with her, and finally convinced her to leave the city and be with him. "I may not seem like much," proposed Larry, "but you'll never starve with me.". Ann accepted, and they were married three weeks later, October 18th, 1997.

They honeymooned at Niagra Falls, of all places. After a week they returned to the homestead, just in time to prepare for hunting season. Good old Al had recently built a home in a posh suburb of Detroit for a fairly wealthy man, Dick Avery, who considered himself a sportsman. Al described the good hunting by his place in Ubly, which was now a three bedroom ranch-style home he had built himself. Larry had outfitted it with a windmill and other contraptions. Dick said he'd love to go, so Al brought him up.

In late November, after weeks of spreading around apples from his

orchard, Larry had several deer runs ready for the season. Dick bagged a 9 point buck opening day and couldn't be happier. The celebration went long into the night. Larry learned that Dick was a investment advisor. After a few drinks of Larry's homebrew, Dick loosened up and began voicing his concerns about the economy.

"Yep, this year has been a real bear!", Dick proclaimed. "The market is just about as wild as it can be. Up and down, up and down like a rollercoaster. It's just like the summer of '29." Larry agreed with him. Although he didn't have any money invested in the financial markets, Larry did watch them with interest. He knew that one possible scenario for social unrest would be the economy going into the tank.

Al did have some money invested in mutual funds and asked for advice. "Well", said Dick, "you can play it safe and cash out, but don't expect a check for awhile. Some funds take three months to pay you off. A helluva lot can happen in three months." It certainly did.

For the second year in a row, North America got clobbered by a hard winter. Record snowfalls and low temperatures plagued the MidWest and NorthEast coast. Elsewhere, in Florida and California, rain came down by the bucketfull. Winter crops were ruined. The past summer had not been good due to all the flooding from the previous winter. Food prices began to creep up.

Al got his money out of mutual funds, and so did many others. The markets continued to fluctuate. But then trend was definitely going downward. The Dow Jones hadn't topped the 6,500 mark in four months, and by March '98, it had dipped below 6,000. The large commercial banks began increasing the rates of interest they charged. Insurance companies also increased rates to policy holders. Several major pension funds were in trouble and petitioned Congress for assistance.

As credit became more expensive and harder to come by, major purchases, like cars and homes, began to slow down. Retailers had a bad Christmas, and several large chain stores announced store closings and layoffs. By April '98, nearly every aspect of the economy was in decline. Analysts termed it "The Crawl". The Federal Reserve wanted to lower interest rates, but with prices rising in key sectors, they chose not to. Bankruptcy for both individuals and businesses increased dramatically. Many could not pay their

income taxes. The government's take declined from the year before, although spending increased. The deficit was increased, despite well made plans and heated arguments.

As the summer approached, the situation grew worse. Being an election year, Congress assured everyone that it would not reduce the amount of aid and assistance. Plans for slowing the increases in various programs were put on hold while the planned increase in the minimum wage went forward. This put more pressure on businesses and another round of layoffs, downsizing, and price increases ensued. The high unemployment wasa compensated with extensions for welfare, all at the expense of the National Debt. But the government accepted this, hoping to keep things under control.

Somehow, the nation managed to make it through the rest of the year, but the price was high. The Debt approached the six trillion dollar mark, and some economists said that it was really much higher than that. The Consumer Price Index rose to 7%, more than doubling from the year before. There was no indicators of 'The Crawl' getting better. Congressional elections went through with the Democrats regaining control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Many saw this as a good sign. Wall Street didn't.

Late November was the start of a new round of market devaluation. With another bad Christmas for retailers, it looked like a very long winter indeed. When the new Congress took office in 1999, a whole new crop of spending programs were proposed. "The Debt doesn't mean anything.", explained one newly elected Democratic Senator. "The people need help now!"

Larry and his new family didn't need any help. He had paid off his mortgage years before. They had plenty to eat, and a few extra dollars to rub. Adam was mechanically inclined, and Larry taught him a great deal. Ann found life on the homestead very refreshing and peaceful. Sure, there was always work to do and sometimes it was hard. But the fresh air, safe location, and friendly neighbors more than made up for it.

Chapter Five: The Whip

In the Spring of 1999, 'The Crawl' worsened. The Dow Jones, which had already lost nearly twenty percent of its value in two years took a dramatic nose dive when Congress announced a new series of tax and spending increases. The Federal Reserve, agitated by this, turned against Washington which demanded that interest rates be lowered. Instead, they raised it a full point, in an effort to persuade the Congress to rethink its policies.

Farmers across the country, deeply in debt from two bad seasons, now had trouble raising the funds to plant this year. Despite the fact that winter had been mild, things looked bleak. Food production would still be down and prices rose again. Other industries were in trouble as well thanks to the lack of credit and consumer confidence. In many states, unemployment hit the ten percent mark.

Tax collection had become a dangerous enterprise. The amount that was collected, for the second year in a row, declined. The government's General Accounting Office announced that its projections for increases in the National Debt would be off by some fifteen percent. This was a huge number.

Congress, with no intentions of backing down to the Federal Reserve, a private banking consortium, declared its intentions to issue U.S. Treasury Notes in order to pay the interest due on the Debt and still fund all its new programs. This sent shockwaves around the world. Many countries began dumping dollars. The sell off however did not go very smoothly. As it turned out, there were few takers.

Other countries were having problems of their own. In Europe, unemployment had already been high as it was. With America buying fewer goods, especially now with the dollar in decline, the situation grew worse. France and Germany were especially hard hit with strikes and unrest. Japan and most of Asia were also hurting from the lack of exports into the U.S., and they too faced recession.

The plans to 'paper' the Debt met with strong action by the Federal Reserve, which raised interest rates to ten percent. Larry and his family watched as one evening news broadcast did a special report on this situation. "It's utter madness!", one economist said in nearly shouting. "I'm starting to believe that the country is being run by a bunch of morons!" Larry smiled at that. He knew that long ago.

By June, the dollar was in freefall, inflation was becoming a daily event, and despite an increase in relief spending, the growing number of unemployed found themselves worse off than before. "How can I feed my family on what they give me!", exclaimed one woman standing outside a grocery store. "A half gallon of milk is three bucks, as is a loaf of bread! Somebody better do something or they'll have hell to pay!" Somebody was doing something, but they were doing the wrong things.

Just before July 4th, the President and Congress agreed to a new program of wage and price controls. Unfortunately, reality and private industry didn't agree to it. Producers began reducing their output and stockpiling. Another series of layoffs began pushing the unemployment level past twelve percent. Some of the academics who advised Washington began urging federalization of key industries. "At least send some marshalls to these businesses and force them to deliver the goods.", one such animal said during a TV interview. Many people were now especially blaming the farmers who refused to send produce till they got a fair price.

Mother Nature then anteed up and a wave of blistering heat gripped much of the nation. Within a week, frazzled nerves began to come unglued. In New York City, a grocery store announced that due to the lack of fresh produce, they would limit each customer in their purchases. This met with an angry response. People smashed down the windows and looted the store. Watching it live on TV, others feared that their local market would be next. A rush of panic buying broke out and when store owners tried to slow things down, more rioting was the result.

In Chicago, the heat and humidity helped fueled tempers when police made a routine traffic stop. In St. Louis, a gang of bank robbers got into a running gun battle with police. The criminals were heavily armed and dozes of bystanders were killed or wounded. Civic leaders were outraged as to how the police let the situation get so out of hand. "Better to just let them go than destroy a neighborhood.", complained one such 'leader'.

By the first week of August, nearly every city was now on the verge of outright chaos. A trickle of people began packing up their belongings and heading for cottages or other 'retreats'. Al, who had only planned on staying at his place in Uibly for the July 4th holiday, decided to extend his visit. Other members of the Stewart family were now staying with either Uncle Pete or Larry.

It was in August that a meeting was held, secretly, at the county building

in Bad Axe. Though Larry was not an elected official, he was friends with the Sherrif and his cousin Jimmy was a commissioner. Both of them knew that Larry had been expecting something like this for a long time, so he was asked to make a presentation before the commissioners.

"What we're seeing is just the beginnings of a major breakdown.", he began. "True, things may blow over and quiet down. But I think it would be prudent to take some precautionary steps now in the event that the situation deteriorates." One of the commissioners then asked what sort of steps? Larry took a sip of water and then said, "To begin with, we should quietly start telling the farmers and local seed suppliers to keep their stocks up. The less food that leaves the better. I'd also start seriously looking at stockpiling what fuel we can. The powerplant will need coal and we're gonna need all the gasoline, diesel, and kerosene we can put our hands on. Also natural gas and propane. Only a few of the towns are set up for gaslines, the majority of people use propane."

"Next, there's the matter of security. I know some of you don't like the local militias or issuing CCWs. But I think you'll have to let the sherrif start to talk with them and work out a plan of cooperation. This will mean that we'll have to create some militia units. That means organizing, training, and equipping them. It's better to do this under the direction of the legal authority than to let them just form on their own. And if things get worse, they will form. We'll have to especially concentrate on the major roads leading into Huron County. Fortunately, we only really have three main ways of getting here. Two from the south, M-25 and M-53, and one from the west, M-25 leading to Bay City and Saginaw. As far as the south approaches go, we're 150 miles north of Detroit, with plenty of towns and gun owners between us and any trouble that might come our way."

"The natural tendency is for people to head south should trouble begin. Most will figure they'll have a better chance of survival in a warmer climate. Not many will want to take their chances dealing with winter. It's not all that far off. Within eight weeks, it's gonna start getting chilly around here. Another six or so and we'll start getting snow. But, I'm sure some people will come our way. Which brings me to the next topic - refugees."

"You folks are going to have to decide just what to do about them. Now with most of the smaller county roads ending at M-59, which is like a east-west border on our south, we could funnel people through that away. I'd suggest that we get a few laptop computers and develop lists of all residents and try to find out what family members they have. If we are forced to set up roadblocks,

then we can use these to only let in people with family. I'd also consider a list of desirable skills and professions. Such as doctors, nurses, etc..., that would be granted permission to resettle here."

"This seems pretty extreme!", snorted one commissioner. "And just what do we do about people who won't just be shuffled off at these roadblocks of yours?" Larry looked about the room. He suspected that few people here truly understood what he was talking about. Or maybe they did know but just couldn't bring themselves to accept the possibilities of society collapsing around them.

"That will be up to you folks to decide.", offered Larry. "But I would suggest that if we intend on being humanitarians, then it is doubly important that we begin preparing now. I have no desire to shoot anyone who simply wants a meal. And if that person is willing to do some work and abide by some common rules of decency, I'd say let them stay as long as they want. The question is, how many can we support? Or at least how many are we willing to try to help? Every day we spend now preparing may mean saving us from making a difficult, moral decision."

The room breathed a collective sigh of relief. The unspeakable remained unspoken, though Larry and others wondered just how long that may last. He finished up his presentation, stressing communications, medical supplies, and some sundry matters. The Board of Commissioners then voted on Larry's basic proposals. It was decided to start making essential preparations should the worse happen. In the next few weeks, it became quite clear that time was running out.

By mid-August, rioting had broken out in several major cities, fortunately not in Detroit. Tension was strained there, but the mayor and community leaders were pretty successful in holding off serious trouble, at least at first. In New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta, things went from bad to worse. The National Guard was mobilized. Houston and Miami soon joined in as well. Rioting also broke out elsewhere. Eventually, as resources were strained, Detroit, too, succumbed to the inevitable. As rioting was squelched in one location, it broke out someplace else. The government tried to hold things together. But each day carried more bad news.

Despite the wage and price controls, inflation proceeded at a quick tempo. By September, the rate topped the 100% mark. Wall Street had long since crashed and the Dow was closing in on the 1,000 points. People somehow managed to do the best they could, with barter replacing a cash society. By

mid-September, what little order was left in the major cities had given way to chaos. In Washington, the government declared bankruptcy. A state of emergency was now in effect.

Then, from out of the blue, somebody rose to the occasion. Former U.S. Army General Matthew Gordon made an appeal for calm. He said during one of the last major TV interviews of 1999 that he had the support of several divisions commanders and was now in control of the government. Many people had considered him to be a possible candidate for President in 2000. Plenty wished he had run last time.

What military units were involved in trying to maintain order in the cities were now pulled back and closing them off instead. Those trying to flee were forced back. Major highways were blocked and some secondary roads cut off as well. But still they came, and refugees were gunned down, or directed into camps. But within days, and in some places, hours, this plan fell apart. The military withdrew back to their bases. The last dramatic steps to save the day had failed. The whip had come down, and it cracked loud and hard.

Chapter Six: Shade Of The Oak Tree

Back in August, the day after the secret meeting, the Sheriff pulled up outside Larry's home. "Mornin', Larry", Sam Jenkins called out from behind the wheel when he saw Larry step outside. He watched as Larry kissed his wife good-bye and headed towards the car. Jenkins observed that Stewart was dressed in just a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. No sign of a weapon, although he knew Larry had a revolver and a CCW for it. "Ready to meet the Colonel?", Jenkins asked. Larry smiled and "Let's do it."

Their destination was a few miles outside the town of Ruth. 'Colonel' Roger Maas was the leader of the Huron County Militia. An ex-Marine Gunnery Sergeant, Maas had been leader since the group's inception in 1993. The group had its ups and downs over the years. It boasted over a hundred members till the Oklahoma City bombing. Then, membership dropped down to about a dozen and a half of the faithful. After a couple of years, it began growing again. No doubt that in the past few months, it had swelled to its peak numbers.

As they approached Maas' place, they saw several men dressed in camo-BDUs carrying rifles. Sam stopped the marked cruiser when he came upon

them. "Mornin', Sherrif, what can we do you for?", asked Kevin Harper, who was apparently in charge of the roadblock. "We wanna see your boss, Kevin.", answered Jenkins. Harper backed away and used a portable radio. He then flagged the car through.

They slowly drove up the 300 or so yards of dirt road, past a treeline to the residence. Maas owned 25 acres, most of it wooded. He bought the place about ten years ago when he retired from The Corp. He had his pension and earned extra income as a liscenced gun dealer and shooting instructor. Deeper into the property was 'The Pit', and earthen-worked shooting ranging. Maas had trained many of Jenkins deputies the honing their skills.

A collection of trailer homes and sheds came into view as the car passed the treeline. Larry and Sam could see a beehive of activity. To the right were eight men doing some form of drilling, apparently in hand-to-hand combat. Over on the far left, past the trailers, another group was working on their weapons, probably getting ready for target practice. Sam drove the car towards the double-trailer home in the center. Maas and another, his right-hand man, Hank DeWitt, were standing outside, ready to greet the Sherrif and Larry. One look at the flagpole told the whole story. The American flag was up-side down, and below it flew a bright gold Gadsen flag, with the "Don't Tread On Me" snake.

Sam and Larry got out of the car, and Maas and DeWitt exchanged pleasantries with the Sherrif. The 'Colonel' then turned towards Larry. "What's the Junk-Man doing with ya, Sam? We don't need any used tires here." As the two militiamen chuckled, Larry shook his head and smiled to Maas. "I always say nice things about you, too, Roger". Larry and Roger had met many times before and usually had some serious arguments concerning politics. There was no doubt in Larry's mind that Maas saw him as either a fool or extremely naive.

Sam explained that they wanted to discuss some matters with Maas. He breifly mentioned that there had been a meeting yesterday concerning the growing unrest across the country. Roger already knew that there had been a meeting, though his intelligence people did not have details. "Well then," offered Maas, "let's step into my office". He motioned them towards a group of folding chairs underneath a large oak tree. The sun was already making things hot, and the cool shade was welcome. Larry smiled as he thought to himself that he may be participating in the drafting of their own version of the Magna

Carta, which was also hammered out under the shade of a friendly tree.

Jenkins began spelling out some details. He told of how the commissioners were organizing for as much fuel and other critical supplies to be acquired. Contact with the surrounding counties would also be made to further coordinate efforts. Then, Jenkins got around to what Maas had been waiting for. "I have been authorized," Jenkins announced, "to form a volunteer posse and to deputize as many people as I feel necessary to safeguard Huron County."

Maas and DeWitt looked at each other and smiled. "Well," started Roger, "don't that beat all. So you want to make our militia official?" "It kinda looks that way, Roger.", answered Jenkins. "What will be our primary role?", asked DeWitt. The Sherrif pulled out a detailed map of the county and spread it out on the ground. All roads, even most of the dirt ones were shown, as well as some topographical information. With bright red markers, there were also two sets of numbers by each town.

"My staff and I were up most of the night working on this.", explained Jenkins. "We cross referenced DMV and voter records to come up with a number of how many men between the ages of 18 and 45 there are in each town. That's the first number. The second number is based on hunting liscences and gun permits. We intend to organize as many people as possible. Each town will have it's own unit, led by the local constable. In Bad Axe and some of the larger towns with police, then they will make allowances for several units in each, depending on how many law enforcement personel available."

"I tend to figure that if we can muster at least ten percent of the numbers listed in most places, we'll be doing alright. With Bad Axe being our only large town, I am worried about trouble breaking out there. But, if we can get our acts together fast enough, I think we can prevent that from even happening. Mind you, we will not tolerate vigilantes. Each posse, or militia unit if you like, will be under the direction of a recognized member of law enforcement."

"As far as your group goes, you may maintain whatever pecking order of ranks you have. But where, when, and how you operate will be under the Sheriff's Department's authority. We'll cut you as much slack as possible, but when one of my deputies gives an order, I expect it to be obeyed."

Roger Maas looked at the map. If what Jenkins said was true, then the county was going to be organizing between 2,500 and 3,000 armed men. All of whom lived here and knew the land. They could probably field another 5,000 if need be. Maas' militia numbered a tad over a hundred. Most had just joined or rejoined recently. Only about a dozen or so were worth a spit in the old Marine's eyes. He couldn't fight everyone, especially his neighbors. There would be enough civil war going on without a local one here in the county.

"Okay.", replied Maas. "We'll cooperate." Sam and Larry exchanged smiles and drew deep breathes. "What's the first item on the agenda?", asked Maas.

Larry took over the briefing from here. He pointed to spots on the map and talked about setting up roadblocks at the major highways. First was M-25, which followed the outline of Michigan's thumb along the coast of Lake Huron. Larry suggested that a roadblock be established and manned at both the south-east end of the county, to restrict traffic from the south, and at the west end as well. Next was M-53, which cut straight down the middle and went from Port Austin, at the tip of the thumb, clear down through Detroit.

Roger and Hank agreed that this was a sound precaution. DeWitt then made the suggestion that each roadblock be maintained by at least a dozen men. "They can work in shifts of four, each doing duty four hours on, four off, and then four more on. That way the teams would remain fresh and not get bored. To save on transportation, Larry proposed that each crew of twelve man the roadblock for 3 days, then be relieved by another dozen. People are still going to have to do work on their own places, etc..., so we can't have them there all the time. Everyone agreed with that.

Maas suggested that they take a ride out to scout for good locations. Arrangements were made and Maas left another one of his officers in charge of the training that was going on. Jenkins, Stewart, Maas, and DeWitt piled into the Sheriff's cruiser and left for the first site on M-25, leading south to Detroit.

About twenty minutes later, they came across a likely spot. One side of the road and a steep cliff looking out over Lake Huron. On the other side was a small hill with a stand of pine trees. Larry suggested that a blind could be set up in the trees for lookouts. DeWitt agreed. They also noticed a house that was for sale and not occupied. Jenkins said he'd get the key for it so the house could

be used as a base for the roadblock. DeWitt drew up a rough map and then suggested where some earthworks be prepared. Larry mentioned using 55 gallon drums filled with dirt set up in a staggered formation to slow traffic down. In about thirty minutes, the four men were satisfied and headed off to scout the next location on M-53.

This one would be easier, since Maas mentioned that one of their members had a farm right off the road in the general area. After meeting the owner, who agreed to help, they then made a quick survey of the site. A shallow creek made for a natural barrier and the bridge over it an excellent choke point.

The drive to the third site took longer, nearly an hour. Just west of Caseville, they found a good spot that also had a drop-off on the Lake Huron side. There were no homes near there, but Maas said that he had two old trailers that could be hauled out there and set up in short order. A source for drinking water would have to be found. Larry said he could set up one of his scrap-car windmills and provide at least some DC electricity. Being near the coast, there'd be plenty of wind. Jenkins said he'd have someone come out by tomorrow to find and dig a well.

As they drove back to Maas' place, the four men were in good spirits, feeling the joys of accomplishment. Clearly, they were well on their way to getting ready for what ever the future held. They discussed 'Rules Of Engagement', which put the Sheriff off a bit. They did agree that at least one deputy be stationed at each roadblock and that Maas could have a three-man team with each group. The rest would have to be drawn from locals. DeWitt also added that they had enough HAM radio gear so everyone could stay in contact.

Maas also offered to help train the new units to be formed. Jenkins was glad of that. His own manpower would be stretched thin. "We'll start off with a few people from each area who would in turn then train others in their own communities.", Roger said. He then went on to say that it was his experience that in most military units, only a handful of people did all the real fighting.

"We'd be lucky if 3-5% of recruits had any significant prior experience with rifles. In Vietnam, most just fired wildly in any old direction. Most of the real work was done with artillery, or by those who were good at sniping. We

do have an advantage here with so many hunters. Still, it's one thing to shoot at an animal for sport, and a whole other thing to shoot at people who are shooting back at you."

As they grew near to Maas' place, Roger then turned to Larry and brought up the old argument. "Sam, just what exactly is Junk-Man's involvement gonna be in all of this? You do realize he's the next best thing to a traitor?" "A traitor?", Sam asked. "What the hell are you talking about? Larry has been an excellent advisor to us in this. I know he's been saying that society was gonna breakdown for years."

"That may be," Roger offered, "but he has some strange opinions about our nation's Constitution." Larry then spoke up. "Look, you guys have been beating the drum for returning to the original intent of the Founding Fathers for years. But the reality is that we haven't had that for over a hundred years. Some might say not since the Civil War. Even Jefferson admitted that he trashed the Constitution when he made the Louisiana Purchase. One could even say Washington threw it away during the Whiskey Rebellion."

"I've never said that the Constitution was a bad document, Roger. It was a tremendous leap towards self-rule when conceived. But like all works of Man, it's not perfect. It had flaws. When the Swiss wrote their constitution in the 1830s, they recognized that ours gave too much power to the Congress. That's why they only gave their legislature the power to spend tax money but kept the power to tax with the citizens."

"My basic point is that while it was a great document, it needs work to make it a better one. If we just go backwards, things may be fine for a generation or two, but eventually you'd condemn our children and grandchildren to the same problems we face today. Now, more than ever, it's time to look forward, so we don't leave the same legacy of corruption."

Chapter Seven: Harvest Of Chaos

In the weeks from early August through mid-October, America, and the world as a whole, descended into a universe of chaos. In urban America, life went from difficult to impossible to down right deadly. Food, fuel, and patience ran out. The confusing situation with Washington and the military just brought on the inevitable.

Random violence soon took on a deliberate nature. Vigilante groups fought it out with gangs of hoodlums. What police that were left tried to defend small pockets where they brought their families. Once the military retreated from it's roadblocks, the masses began their exodus. Most headed for warmer climates as Larry predicted. Those who had someplace to go tried to get there.

Once the wage and price controls began, shortages of gasoline became common, then chronic. Those who did not leave prior to the unrest were stuck. By mid-September, when it was now obvious that Washington lost control, refugees had no choice but to travel on foot.

Meanwhile, the situation in Huron County had firmed up. Roadblocks had been established and the militias were formed. Most of the training was done on the job. The rotation worked well, especially when it came harvest time. Fuel was allocated from reserves as needed. As much was done by hand as could be. An Amish community north of Bad Axe helped out where they could. Larry spent alot of time with them.

Armed with an instant camera, notebook, and various measuring devices, he was busy learning what he could about their horse-drawn equipment. The county-wide survey of beasts of burden showed a fair number. While they estimated to have enough fuel for this season, next year would mean a return to farming the old fashioned way. With luck, they would be able to fabricate some of what they needed.

Afterwards, Larry met with the engineers and managers of the few factories there were in the area. They looked over Larry's data. None were optimistic, but they did agree to give it a go. The area's electrical power plant only had enough coal for six months at best. Rationing would begin with power on for only a few hours a day. Natural gas was also a problem. But Michigan did have sources for it further upstate. Not to mention oilwells. Some form of barter would have to be developed.

The Governor of Michigan had set up a headquarters near Grayling. There was a large National Guard base there. One of the county commissioners and one of the militiamen familiar with HAM radio (both of whom were bachelors) were selected to fly up there in late September. Other representatives gathered there from across the state and even some from other state to

coordinate their efforts. Just because the Federal government had taken a powder, didn't mean that everyone else did.

The situation was indeed shaping up. While it would be a long time before things returned to pre-chaos conditions, the level of fear was subsiding in Huron County. Other places were not as well off. To the south, St. Clair county was having a rough time with refugees and looters. They begged for help. Most of their better trained people were lost. They had the numbers, but were low on experience and leadership.

Hank DeWitt volunteered to help whip things into shape. An former Army officer with infantry experience, he felt obligated to have a go at it. Many of those who had been killed and were militia people from before were friends of his. He and a dozen others packed up and headed south on the 25th of September.

With the harvest in full swing, and man-power getting tight, the militia needed to recruit new people. Larry, who had been more valuable with other matters, decided to lend a hand. His buddy Al also signed up. Not wanting to leave his home defenseless, Larry choose to leave the shotgun and .38 there. He took with him his trusty M1 Garand.

For a sidearm, he did have a .44 black powder pistol. Many saw this as a joke, but Larry was actually quite good with it. He had trained before with the help of Uncle Pete. They'd tape paper targets to the sides of tires. Pete would then roll them down an incline. Larry would draw and fire when they came into view. He wasn't exactly a trick-shot, but he could hit anything within 25 feet.

Larry and Al borrowed two horses from Pete and set off to the roadblock at M-53 on the 27th. They were only to stay for 3 days, but packed 5 days worth of food and water. Larry borrowed a mule from his next door neighbor to carry the grain for the animals. It may have been only thirty miles, but it took most of the day to get there. Every hour or so, they dismounted and walked a spell. After 6 hours, they stopped for lunch near a creek, so the horses and mule could get a drink.

They arrived three hours later, a tad past 4pm. About 20 people were there. Some coming on foot or with bikes. Two others used horses, too, but had

less distance. Introductions were made of the new replacements. The sheriff's deputy had yet to arrive, but the militia officer was there, Captain Kevin Harper. Larry, Al, and three others were new recruits. Kevin gave them a brief orientation of the roadblock.

A shallow creek ran east to west across the area. There was a small bridge over it. M-53 was just a two lane paved road here. Drainage ditches along either side of it. About 50 yards south of the bridge, a row of dirt-filled 55 gallon drums, brightly painted blocked the north bound lane. Another 10 yards was row, this time blocking the south bound lane. Two more staggered rows led up to the bridge itself. On the south bank, 3 drums were set on either end, giving only enough room for a vehicle to pass in the center. A long, brightly painted 2 x 10 stretched across the gap. Supports held it up about waste high and one side had a pivot with a weight attached. This made for a nice lever that could be handled easily by one man.

The bridge itself was only about 40 yards in length. In the middle and at the north end were the same set-up of drums, but no barrier. On either side past the ditch were earthworks. These were about nine feet high and formed an 'L' with the short end about 20 feet across the creek and about 40 feet along the road side.

Kevin explained that the routine was for 2 men to be at the first row of drums south of the bridge. The other two men would be at the 'gate' on the bridge's south end. A buzzer was enclosed in a box there, with wires run back to the house and tied into an alarm bell. As soon as any traffic was sighted, two short rings would be the signal. This would be if the traffic appeared non-violent from a distance.

The four men not on duty, but awake, would then be on alert to provide support. Back out on the road, the forward team would stop traffic and after an inquiry and possible search, they would then pass the traffic on to the bridge. If the people were not known, one representative would be escorted back to the house where he/she would be asked if they owned property, or had family or friends in Huron County. This information would be checked on the laptops the sheriff's office provided.

If the traffic were total strangers, then clearance would have to be recieved from headquarters in Bad Axe. With most refugees being on foot,

transportation would be arranged. The county had set-up two sites in state parks for people. Someone with needed skills would be taken to an alternate location where they were needed. Anyone with a criminal record was arrested on site.

Kevin then explained what the drill was if the approaching traffic looked like trouble from afar. In this case, a the alarm would be continuous. All men, awake or asleep would head directly for the earthworks. The outer patrol would retreat and with the bridge detail, also head for the earthworks. On the north end of the bridge was a box of calthrops which would be spread out, to bust any tires and maybe some feet, too. A signal would be sent to headquarters and one man would bring a small 2-meter radio for maintaining contact.

So far, they had yet to have such an event, but they would be drilled on it from time to time. Kevin would also drill the raw recruits in other matters while not serving on the roadblock itself. He stressed that while here, they always have their weapon within an arm's length away. He also advised each man to have a ruck sack with one day's food and water. First aid kits and other gear would be helpful. He handed out lists of what each member should have by their next tour of duty.

Chapter Eight: A Committee For Progress

The Emergency Committee of Huron County held it's weekly meeting on October 3rd. Larry was able to attend, less than fresh from his first tour of roadblock duty. Agriculture was first on the agenda.

The news was fairly good. Production overall was only down about thirty percent from last year. Not bad considering only about half the fuel and energy were used. Much of the harvesting was done by hand, thanks to instruction by the local Amish settlement and the spare labor now available. Priority was given to non-hybrid crops, so that there would be seed for next season. The next year or two may see further decline, but most were confident that production would suffice in meeting the food requirements and eventually improve to surplus.

Next was the energy report. This was bleak. The local power plant might have enough coal to get through the winter. But it meant further reductions in

time-on-line. Most agreed that emphasis should now be directed into providing electricity more at night than during the day. This was needed for heating purposes. The phone system could still be maintained, but by March of 2000, the coal would run out.

Natural gas, propane, and other petroleum based fuels were in dwindling supplies. Priority would be given to operating emergency vehicles. Those with private stocks of fuel would be asked to contribute, but the committee refrained from forcing people to give up their supplies.

The Security situation was next. Sherrif Jenkins was joined by both Roger Maas, and Hank DeWitt, who had just returned from training people in St. Clair County. After Jenkins gave a rundown on local crime, which there was very little of, DeWitt was permitted to explain the situation in the south.

"Things are starting to settle down. We've helped train another 500 or so men in the basics. They lost a lot of people, both from dealing with trouble from Detroit, and in their own backyard of Port Huron. Nearly a quarter of the Port Huron area is gone, burnt down, destroyed. The death toll is something like five to ten thousand. Nobody's sure of anything. I guess that's not bad considering the area had over a hundred thousand."

"I went on one recon mission to Detroit. Didn't get within 10 miles of it. The roads are a mess. Deserted vehicles, rubble. From some radio broadcasts, mainly CB, we've intercepted, half the Metro area is gone. They are literally eating each other down there. The death toll is probably at least half a million and maybe three or four times higher than that."

"Most of those who did get out headed south into Ohio and beyond. By the time the military pulled out, gasoline was scarce. I don't think we have too much to worry about bands of marauders. At least not large groups, anyway."

"Right now, St. Clair County needs to deal with it's refugee problem. They'd like to pass about 2-3000 our way. Their own farm production will be adequate, they say. They, too, are just about out of fuel. Other than food, they are lacking in just about everything. The big worry is for an epidemic to breakout. The dying is far from over."

Roger Maas then gave his report. The Huron County Militia (HCM),

were now over a 1,000 strong. Most were assigned to assisting their local law enforcement. About a third were being used for the roadblocks. Coastal patrols worried him. Most of the county was surrounded on three sides by water. As far as the land routes, he had beefed up the defenses to the west, where trouble from the small cities of Saginaw and Bay City existed.

There had been two skirmishes already and he expected more. Casualties were light for the HCM. Now that the harvest was in, he wanted to add another few hundred. Winter would put a further strain on manpower.

Some good news followed when the manufacturers reported that they were confident about converting much of the towed farming equipment to beast-power. Leather was needed, and all animals which will die from attrition or hunting would be utilized. Making fasteners and other components for yokes and harnesses would be no problem.

Replicating other equipment from plans based on the Amish devices would be done, but in limited numbers. They were hopeful to have enough in time for the next season, but this would add to the decline in expected output. The days of high-tech, mechanized farming were gone.

The subject of refugees was next. So far, the county had some 5,000 and they proved to be grateful and helpful. They really came in handy during the harvest. However, living conditions in the shelters were not good, and would be inadequate for winter. A survey of unoccupied housing showed that they could relocate the current group, especially if families were doubled up.

As for taking on the extra load from St. Clair County, the committee had reservations. While they could feed them, providing other support would be difficult. Medical supplies were limited to begin with, and most refugees were in a sorry state. Since the current group had worked side-by-side with residents in the harvest, a level of friendship and trust had been established. This would not be the case for the new group, and winter could breed resentment and unrest.

One man spoke up and suggested that it was time to take drastic steps. He didn't say what those steps were, but he didn't have to. The subject of liquidating refugees had been on many minds from the beginning. Few openly discussed it, but many knew that at some point, it may become necessary.

Another asked if the state government could help. The Committee Chairman said that there was little they could do. Reorganization was still an on-going process. However, he would make it a point to contact them immediately. Further discussion on taking additional refugees would be tabled.

Larry then suggested that a serious effort be made for developing alternate energy. He passed around plans he had for building simple windmills and methane distillers from scrap material. He then also passed around plans for solar cookers and dehydrators. He said all were easy to construct and was willing to teach a team of instructors. That plan was accepted without argument. Roger Maas leaned over and said to Larry, "Good thing we have an expert in using junk." That brought a round of laughter that was sorely needed.

Chapter Nine: Blood In The Snow

The first snow fell on October 20th. Of course, it had to happen when Larry had roadblock duty. The wind was picking up and reduced visibility. It would be worse when Larry took his second shift of the day at night. The only good thing was that the shifts were reduced from 4 to 3 hours with the addition of more troops.

Al and Larry shivered by the gate on the south end of the bridge on M-53. Two new recruits, both who had been refugees two months ago, had the duty down the road. One new improvement was an hard-wired intercom that connected all posts.

"Don't you just love this weather?", asked Al. "Makes me enjoy guard duty so much more." "Yeah," answered Larry, "I found a home in the militia. Soon as this shift is over, let's check the horses." Al smiled, "Oh yeah? Brought some of that apple-jack?" "Yep," Larry winked, "aged a solid week." "Sounds good to me.", replied Al.

The quiet was then shattered with a pair of screams from the forward post. Larry and Al squatted behind the drums and peered through the snow. They saw several white-clad figures standing over the bodies of their comrades. Larry hit the panic button, sounding the alarm. Al drew a bead on one figure with his Remington 700. Many a deer had been fallen by this weapon, but now, Al shot his first human.

Larry saw the figure go down, then fired a series of rapid shots with his Garand. He thought he saw one go down, but couldn't be sure if he connected. The aggressors had taken cover behind the drums. A dozen fellow militiamen rushed to their position. Kevin Harper and Deputy Tom Davis scampered towards the bridge while the rest split up for the two earthworks. Over the intercom, Harper called Larry and Al.

"What'ya see?", Harper barked. "Maybe a half dozen dressed in white ponchos at the forward post. We have two men down, probably dead. One badguy down, maybe two." Larry waited after making his report. There was nothing happening. The silence was eerie and nerve racking. Al and Larry's heart's were racing. On the northside of the bridge, Harper worked his handheld 2-meter radio, reporting to HCM headquarters. Deputy Davis went for his bullhorn.

"Man, we gotta get out of here!", said Al. "You got that right, buddy.", replied Larry. He took a fresh clip out of his bandolier and placed it at a handy spot next to him. Larry figured he had maybe two or three rounds to go before the Garand was empty. The badguys were lying low and still had not returned fire. Larry was wondering if they had any guns. They may have jumped the forward team and used knives. The badguys now, at the least had the look-out's weapons and ammo.

The waiting ended when Deputy Davis called out with his bullhorn. "This is the Huron County Militia. You people are ordered to surrender now. Lay down your weapons and stand up with your arms over your heads. And take off those white ponchos!" Harper then came on the intercom. "Larry, Al, we're coming up." Al kept looking forward, while Larry acknowledged and turn to watch Harper, Davis, and two others sprint across the bridge towards them.

The badguys started shooting. Larry watched as his comrades ducked behind the drums at the mid-point of the bridge, some twenty yards behind them. Al cracked off two shots, causing one badguy he could make out to hide behind a drum. Larry now looked forward and emptied his rifle at them. He quickly reloaded. By now, silence returned. Everything was going in slow motion.

With the deputy and another covering, Harper and another crawled forward to the south end of the bridge. "Glad you could make it.", Larry said. Harper ignored the remark and issued orders. "Okay, we're gonna open fire so the others can make it up here. Get ready. Now!" All four men then began firing. Al only got off two shots before being forced to reload. Larry emptied his weapon. Harper and the other militiaman both had AR-15s with 30 round clips. They fired a series of burts.

Things got crowded behind the drums at the south gate. Neither Larry nor Al minded. Everyone reloaded and Harper spelled out the plan. "We're gonna flush them out. When the rest of you open up, Larry and I will slip down the drainage ditch on the right. We'll make our way forward and force them to the left."

Larry wasn't keen on the whole idea. But he nodded and made himself ready. With a hail of gunfire pinning the badguys down, Larry and Kevin crawled around the drums and slid down the ditch on the right. The snow made it easy. So far, so good. Kevin took the lead, with Larry about three yards behind. As their friends reloaded, the badguys returned fire. It sounded like only two guns, which made Larry suspect that this bunch was using the captured arms. Neither of the recruits had pistols. Both had been outfitted with old mausers.

As the two militiamen approached the first set of drums, some twenty yards from the bridge, Kevin motioned Larry to get behind them. The next set was on the left side of the road ten yards away. Kevin explained that he was going to move up the ditch another twenty yards to the next set on the right. About half way there, he'd let loose a gernade, then charge forward. When he would fire his rifle, Larry would then move up to the drums on the right.

Kevin radioed to the others to get ready. He then slipped back down the ditch when the deputy and his team began firing. Larry hunkered down, now more afraid of being hit from the rear than by the badguys. He postioned himself half in the ditch and half behind the drum, rifle aimed to the south. He watched Kevin crawl forward, then stop short of the next drums.

The gernade was well thrown. It dropped about two or three yards south of the next row of drums. When it exploded, Kevin scampered out of the ditch and crouched behind the drums. He then began firing his rifle. As Larry

darted forward, he saw two men in white dash away. Large red blotches quickly appeared on their clothing. They tumbled and fell. Kevin ducked to reload and Larry now rested his rifle on the top of a drum and searched for targets.

He saw their two fallen comrades sprawled out in pools of blood, clearly visible in the snow. One of the men Kevin had hit started to move. Larry pumped two rounds into him. One of the mausers was now visible. That left one unaccounted for. Larry now fixed his gaze on the row of drums to the left, a mere ten yards away. A person popped up with the other mauser. Larry fired three shots. He watched as one round took the top of the man's skull off.

Kevin saw this, now reloaded and ready. He unpinned another grenade and tossed it behind the last set of drums. After it exploded, he rushed forward. There was some groans, but they fell silent as Kevin popped off two aimed bursts. He then turned back and waved. Larry advanced and saw the bodies close up. A groan came from the ditch on the left. As Larry and Kevin approached it, they saw another badguy, wounded.

"Don't shoot! I give up!", he cried out. Deputy Davis and the others were now on the scene. He searched the last survivor, who had been shot by Larry at the very beginning. Davis interrogated him and learned that he and his five partners had escaped a refugee camp before dawn, some twenty miles away. Their white ponchos turned out to be bedsheets from their cots. Armed only with splivs fashioned from spoons, their plan was to head north where they heard there were fewer people and more food.

Davis sent men back to the house for his evidence kit, with which he photographed and fingerprinted each of the badguys. Using the 2-meter radio, he contacted headquarters. Jenkins instructed Davis to "finish the job". Davis looked uncomfortable with that. Harper stepped forward and fired one round into the man's head. "He killed our own.", was all Harper said to Davis as he walked away. Davis never worked roadblock duty again.

Chapter Ten: Crystal

Larry was conducting classes in gardening to a group of refugees. Held in a nearby school, he went through the basics. Spring was not far off, and everyone was busy preparing. He had already started many plants in his

greenhouse. Even, marijuana. It had been decided by the County government to legalize it. In addition to being a crop of high barter value, hemp had many uses. Larry had confessed to growing it in the past to Sherrif Jenkins. Sam smiled and shook his head. "Geez, Larry, and you never shared any with me!"

When Larry went through the vegetables, fruit, and herbs, he then began lecturing on 'The Herb'. This earned chuckles and extra attention by some. "Beside the more infamous use of hemp, the plant's fibers can be used for making rope, paper, and cloth. I might add that in olden days, hemp clothing was noted for being very durable. Shirts would last for some twenty years or more with care. In the present circumstances, this will be very useful."

After describing many of the other uses, he dismissed the class and headed home. Larry was about half way home when he came across a man waving at the side of the road. It was one of the refugees who was now occupying a trailerhome on a neighbor's farm. Larry brought the horse to a stop.

"Hey! Hey, fella! I need help!", the man shouted. Larry dismounted and tied the horse off to a tall bush near the trailer. "It's my wife, fella, she's gonna have a baby!" 'Oh shoot!', Larry thought to himself. He followed the man inside and saw the wife lying on the couch covered in blankets. The only heat was from a kerosene heater that somebody generously had given them.

Larry looked at the woman, and asked her a few questions. Her water had broken an hour ago. He asked the husband how dialated she was. This took a quick look. He reported that she was at about 2 or 3 inches. Larry figured they had at least an hour from that and the frequency of the contractions. He told the couple that he would go for help.

Back on his horse, Larry made good time getting home. He told Ann what was going on and got on his HAM radio and called the Sherrif's office in Bad Axe. There was still gas for emergency vehicles and Larry was told that an ambulance would be dispatched. He got a few things together, like food and drink, and returned to the trailerhome.

The ambulance arrived shortly after. The couple had a 5 year old daughter, and Larry agreed to take her home with him while the husband rode in the ambulance to the hospital. Daddy bundled his little girl, Crystal, and

handed her to Larry, who handed the food parcel to him and wished good luck. Luck was not on anyone's side that day.

Snowplows had no fuel for clearing roads. Horse powered plows were fabricated, but this always left a hard-packed layer, often as slick as ice. Many roads weren't plowed at all. The ambulance was several miles outside Bad Axe when it lost control and smashed into a tree.

The driver and father in the front cab were both killed instantly. The EMT riding in the back was knocked into the wall and rendered unconscious. A large chest of supplies on a shelf fell on the woman's lower abdomen. The baby was crushed and the woman now was hemorrhaging. By the time help arrived, she, too, had died.

Crystal had been a fountain of excitement. Not only was she soon going to have a baby brother, but she loved the horse ride. Larry suspected that all girls of that age loved horses, remembering his own sister's youthful passions. It was not till shortly after dark that the radio buzzed and the news was relayed. Ann and Larry decided to wait till morning before telling Crystal what happened. When she was fast asleep, Larry, Ann, and Adam prayed together.

Sherrif Jenkins drove a psychiatrist out to Larry's place in his GMC 4x4 carry-all. They had breakfast and then after an hour, the psychiatrist talked with Crystal and told her what happened. Ann helped out, while Larry, Sam, and Adam went outside. "What's gonna happen to her?", asked the teen. "We have an orphanage. I'm sure someone will adopt her.", remarked Jenkins.

"Maybe we will.", said Larry. He looked at Adam, "Your Mom has often said how'd she wishes she had more children. She can't now, and for that matter, neither can I. I got fixed a long time ago. Figured there were too many people on the Earth already." Jenkins interjected, "I can't think of a better couple for adopting that little girl. She's got nobody anymore. You can count on me to help grease the tracks if you want to make it official."

Larry asked Adam and he agreed that he wouldn't mind having a young sister to spoil. Larry then confessed that Ann and he talked about it last night. They all felt it was best for Crystal to have some sense of family during this time. After later discussion with the psychiatrist, all were agreed to let Crystal stay with the Stewarts while the paperwork was dealt with. Ann and Larry

would be coached in how to best handle the situation.

The first days and weeks were difficult. When Spring broke and the activity at the homestead dramatically increased, Ann and Larry kept Crystal busy helping them with minor tasks. Crystal enjoyed spending time with the horses and goats. She quickly adopted one of the new borns. She named him Sparky because of his bright, shiny eyes. Crystal still was given to depression and crying fits, especially at night. But the Stewarts gave their new member as much love as they could. Larry was confident that things would work out.

Chapter Eleven: In Memory Of...

In mid-May, the county was buzzing with activity. There simply weren't enough hours in the day. Every farm was preparing for another season. The few factories were turning out what they could. Fortunately, the power plant was still operating four hours a day, burning bio-mass gathered from last year's harvest. Another one of Larry's suggestions. It may not have been as good as coal, but it was good enough.

There was also now, the prospect of additional electricity from two nuclear plants in the state. Back in February, a coordinated campaign was launched between the National Guard and local militias to pacify and reclaim the cities. The campaign was fairly successful. Important sections of the electrical and phone grids could now be serviced and restored. Government was finally getting a grip on things again.

That caused some concern. But two developments made the old scourge more palatable. First, the Governor was reasonably intelligent and was more than willing to listen to suggestions. Early on, he decided not to pay attention to anyone claiming to be the new provisional Federal government. The state of Michigan was now truly the Republic of Michigan.

Secondly, following a suggestion from a certain fellow in Huron County, a new currency had been issued. Still called 'dollars', out of familiarity, it was based on several commodities. They established one ounce of gold at \$1,000, an ounce of silver at \$10. In addition to this, local county governments were permitted to issue currency based on labor.

People could obtain credit by pledging to do labor. Each hour pledged

earned \$5. The pledgee would have to fulfill the pledge within 30 days. That wasn't hard since there was plenty to do. The counties had to pay off those who food and materials provided to them during the height of the crisis. By late April, with the winter snows gone and roads clear, trade and private enterprise was making a come back.

As Memorial Day approached, most of the crops had been planted, and people began making plans for a celebration. Both to remember the dead and to rejoice in life. Roger Maas had organized a color guard and trained them in some classic drills. They performed at the community picnic in Bad Axe. A rather lengthy ceremony was held for paying homage to those who had sacrificed themselves. Twenty-two militiamen had died since being mustered into duty.

Six died serving on roadblocks. The rest were part of a volunteer unit which had helped during the 'Reclamation Campaign'. Kevin Harper was among this group. He had been shot and killed while trying to recover a wounded militiaman during an assault on a gang-stronghold in Flint. This gang of killers and looters were said to be practicing slavery and cannibalism. The Guard finally just pulverized the stronghold with artillery. There wasn't much left afterthat.

Larry and Al were officially awarded medals for their involvement in 'the Battle of M-53' as it was called. After some four dozen militiamen were honored for their performance, the top clergy in the county held a special mass to remember friends and family lost during the crisis. Following this came the food. Everybody brought extra out of their larders. Some fresh deer was barbecued, fish were fried, and a wide variety of baked goods made the feast a special one.

The obligatory speeches by politicians were held to a minimum, but happened none the less. A high ranking assistant to the Governor attended and announced that Huron County would be reconnected to the electrical grid no later than six weeks. That earned a loud round of cheers. The Dow Chemical plant in Midland was being readied for reopening and there would soon be a supply of propane and other products available before winter.

There was a collection of games and sports after the speeches were completed. Several musical groups took turns providing entertainment. It had

been a long time since most people felt like dancing. But dance they did. As darkness fell, the festival was wrapped up with a short, but spectacular fireworks display. Larry and other basement chemists had put together a nice variety of pyrotechnics.

Chapter Twelve: Rebirth

The Emergency Committee meeting for the first week of August had a special guest speaker. Wayne Goodly, a low echelon administrator for FEMA. He began briefing the committee on the 'big' picture.

"As best as we can determine, about 20 to 30 million Americans have died as a result of violence, starvation, or disease. Most of the cities are in ruins. There's a lot of people missing or hiding, we can't say for sure. The Federal, state, and local governments are mobilizing for a major effort to put the nation back together."

"For most of the past year, we have been doing what we can. Our first concern, once we knew we had lost control, was to safeguard the nation from foreign invasion. Installations like NORAD have been functioning all along. We maintained some ballistic missile submarines and our spy satellites, for example, to achieve this end."

"The National Command Authority was shaken up, but we have been active the past several months in aiding local efforts to restore order. You will soon be receiving a convoy of fuel trucks and other strategic supplies. It's taken quite awhile to clear the main highways and to inspect the rail and pipeline networks. I'm happy to report that they are functional again."

"In the Northeast, we were swamped by refugees. Quite frankly, we maintained our focus on the larger population centers because we knew that you folks in rural America would be better able to fend for your selves. Thankfully, the winter was reasonably mild and we were able to keep the disaster from getting worse. The NCA is very proud of the work you people have done here. We can understand if you have resentment against us for not helping sooner or even for causing the problem in the first place."

"To this end, as soon as possible, National elections will be held so that we can begin making the final push towards restoration. We are hoping to have

most communications and essential infrastructure ready for this by September. It will up to you when you hold your local elections, but by next Spring, we want to have a new civilian government in place." By that time we anticipate several key industries to be functional again, like petroleum. As far as the election of the new president, our plan is for the balloting to occur on the first weekend of November. "

"Production will take awhile to restore, and we are uncertain when we can get the whole economy up and running. Estimates call for another two to three years at least. Perhaps another five years or more before we can expect a lifestyle similar to pre-disaster conditions."

"Now comes the bad news. Taxes." This was met by a loud, long groan. "Now, now. Needless to say, collection is going to be difficult. Taxes are a necessary evil. We have decided that the best way to work this for now is at the local level. Counties will set whatever rates they deem possible for their citizens to pay. We have worked out a deal with all state governments, such that you will then provide a percentage to the state and to the Federal government."

"We only ask that you turn over ten percent of what you take in. Our primary function will be to protect the country from outside aggression. I think you will agree that this is a worth while role for the National government. We will also do what we can for maintaining interstate lines of communication and commerce."

"Most of the rest of will be in your hands and those of your state government. Once a new civilian government is up and running, then a more permanent system will be developed. But for the time being, we feel this method is the most workable and the least burdensome. Most of the money will remain with you to use."

"We should have a new national currency ready for distribution by November. By agreement with the state governments, we will comply with their insistance that the new currency be backed by a basket of commodities, such as gold, silver, oil, etc..., and be redeemable for those items. Fortunately, our stockpiles and reserves of these and other commodities are still secure."

"In conclusion, I have been authorized by the NCA to apologize for what

happened. We screwed up, short and simple. Those who were responsible are no longer in charge. We realize that there will probably be an investigation by the new government and some form of charges and trials conducted to punish those who caused the nation to unravel."

When asked just who is running the NCA, it turned out to be none other than former General Gordon. America had a coup and nobody knew it, at least in Huron County. But, like another general more than two centuries ago, he was prepared to step aside, once his country was out of danger.

It simply came down to the fact that he was respected and trusted by the military, and they were armed and better organized than any other branch of government. The elected government fumbled the football and he grabbed it and worked to keep it safe for the future. Many of the old government had been detained. Gordon promised not to engage in any tribunals and just wait till a new government could be elected.

When the elections were held, none other than Hank DeWitt was named the new member of the House of Representatives. He was well known throughout the area, having helped other counties in organizing and coordinating militias. Some people asked Larry to run, but he chose not to. He did agree to run for a seat as a county commissioner, for sanitation. Larry was, after all, the best Junk-Man around.

Author's Notes

First off, let me acknowledge a few people who influenced me. Ayn Rand and Lysander Spooner, both deceased, have guided me with their writing. Kurt Saxon, who is still alive at the time of this project, also helped shape some of my views concerning survivalism. As being the man who coined the term 'survivalist', his approach to the subject.

To this end, I decided that the hero of "When Autumn Leaves Fall", Larry Stewart, would be a little of all three. Larry has a rational, active mind. He is not afraid to maintain and defend unpopular views. Larry is also a researcher, tinkerer, and master of frugality and improvisation.

The basic purpose of this fiction project was to illustrate how calm, rational, and creative minds can triumph over any situation. That when given a

choice, people will choose to cooperate for mutual benefit rather than isolate themselves. Especially if someone rises to the occasion to take the mantle of leadership, and if there is familiarity amongst the people.

This project was started as a response to another work of fiction, "Triple Ought" (originally known as "The Grey Nineties"). After posting a critique of "Triple Ought" at the alt.survival newsgroup on UseNet, I was challenged to write my own story. So I did.

While I used fictional characters, I did set the tale in a real place, mainly Huron County, Michigan. This was done since I am very familiar with it. In my humble opinion, it's one of the nicest places around. The people are hard working and good natured. When I first visited there on vacation from Detroit, I was really impressed with simple things, like perfect strangers waving at and greeting you. For a city-boy with a streak of cynicism a mile-wide, this re-affirmed Ayn Rand's premise that Man is basically good.

To this end, my story carries this concept forward. There is one circumstance when violence breeds violence. When Kevin Harper, one of the officers of the local militia, shoots a wounded prisoner. Kevin is my foil to represent both the best and worst of Man when faced with violence.

When faced with six 'badguys' who had initiated aggression by killing two sentries, Kevin accounts for killing four of them, including the one wounded criminal who had already surrendered. Kevin later dies bravely, trying to save a fallen comrade while again opposing criminality.

This one chapter was the only one with genuine violence, and one of only three that mention firearms. Unlike other stories about post-catastrophe/survival scenarios, I did not want mine to dwell on guns or violence. This was done to several reasons.

First, I wanted the emphasis, and bulk of the text, to deal more with people working together for a common good. If you want action and gun-play, then go rent a Rambo movie. Too many people associate survivalism with firearms. The truth of the matter is that most of a survivalist's time will not be spent shooting people or even targets. They will spend most of their time either working to feed themselves or in making life a bit more comfortable.

Anyone who has been in combat knows that actual battle is usually very short affairs that follow long periods of boredom and tedious labor. The events of Chapter 8 probably only take at most 30 minutes. Comparing that with the rest of the story, which takes years to unfold.

Again, my primary purpose was to demonstrate how creative and inventive people can adapt and overcome adversity. Larry Stewart is the focus of this, though there are some references to others as well. Larry is not so unique. Most communities have somebody like him. The backyard mechanic, basement experimenter, and collector-refurbisher of garbage. Like the saying goes, 'One man's junk is another's treasure'.

Larry follows another old adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach the man to fish and you feed him for life.". Larry is forever holding classes, sharing information with neighbors. He does this for very practical reasons. Not only does he receive goods or favors in exchange, but the better off his neighbors are, the less likely they will be inclined to succumb to the dark side of human nature and steal from Larry.

Too many survivalists think that all they need to do is cache an assortment of goods advertised in publications like "American Survival Guide". Dehydrated foods and other sundry items. The problem with this is that while others band together to support each other, if you choose to hold out from them, they may be inclined to attack you to seize your cache. Your neighbors consider their survival just as important as you consider yours. Even if they don't, when things settle down and your neighbors begin to rebuild, they will not appreciate you taking advantage of their sacrifices.

This is a very important point to consider if you intend to 'make your stand' in a rural area. People who live in such areas prior to a catastrophe will already know each other and trust one another. If you are a stranger who merely owns a 'retreat' to be used for emergencies and maybe vacations, you will have to work doubly hard if you want to be part of the post-catastrophe society.

Another important matter is just how willing government will be in giving up and hide in a corner. The reality is they will not go away forever. Even in a worse case scenario, say a killer epidemic, nuclear war, or even the impact of a moderate-sized asteroid (where the Earth itself is not destroyed or

knocked out of orbit), government will regroup and re-assert itself. Locally, small towns rural counties, will be less effected and will adapt to the new circumstances rather quickly. However, as you move up the food chain, larger governmental entities are more prepared.

In 99.9% of most disaster scenarios, within 3-7 days, local government will start recover. They will pull together their police, firemen, and anybody else who can walk and chew gum, mobilize them, and put them to work helping to repair the community. Larger institutions, like state and national governments, may take longer, but once they start to roll, look out! I'd say that 3-6 months is a fair period of time for this to take place. In 99.8% of the scenarios, you can cut the timeline considerably.

Humans are social creatures, political animals if you like, and will tend to ban together for a common purpose. Some people might like to think that they'll just have to lay low and hide in the hills when the 'whip comes down'. But, as stated earlier, people are going to start to regroup nearly right away. They will not appreciate you coming down from your mountain after the dust settles and they have done all the hard work of rebuilding. You will be subject to their scorn, mistrust, and ostracized.

One thing I like about Kurt Saxon his his view that the collapse of civilization will be "the greatest adventure" of all time. This is a positive, constructive way to view it. If you are prepared, confident, and willing, you can quickly rise to a post-collapse leadership role and help mold future society. This means staying out in the open and being active with your neighbors in improving the community's overall situation. You aren't going to accomplish that hunkered in your bunker.

Some may like to quote, 'charity begins at home', and for them I wrote Chapter 10. This is where the Stewarts adopt the young girl who is orphaned in a tragedy. Again, the Stewarts exemplify the concept that Man is Good! Also, I threw in the psychiatrist just to irritate some of you. I justify this inclusion for the simple reason that Larry has done so much and helped so many already, I'm sure he wouldn't mind some help himself. Especially for the chore of telling the girl her parents are dead. So even Larry, as self-sufficient as they come, is willing to accept help, too. No man is an island.

The story is concluded with smaller communities banning together to

support each other for the common good. This is a natural evolution. We also complete the journey for Larry, who goes from an eccentric kook, sort of a drop from mainstream society, to becoming a respected leader of the new society. Others follow a similar path, like Roger Maas. Eventually, as the survivors become more confident in the present, they also do likewise for the future.

So much of survivalist literature avoids this. People are more inclined to work hard and sacrifice if it is to achieve a long term goal. You just can't think about when your next meal is or where will I sleep tonight. We have minds that are capable of much more abstract thoughts than those. If we use them, stretch our minds out to the future beyond our immediate needs, they become stronger and healthier. I kept the actual death-toll on the light side based on history. When you look at Man's capacity to endure hardship, such as the siege of Leningrad, for example, it seemed logical to me that most would survive.

Concerning the title, "When Autumn Leaves Fall", I chose this to signify that such disorders or cullings are just part of a natural process that all civilizations go through. And that all things are temporary. Good and bad times have their limits. The seasons will turn.

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**SERF'S UP! - <http://members.tripod.com/~AZarowny/index.html>
Common Sense For The Common Peasant**

