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Man! It Is Cold Outside!

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Man! It Is Cold Outside! - Prolog

Beverly held on tightly with one hand to the handrail, bracing herself against the movements of the research vessel. She cradled the satellite telephone in her other hand and dialed with her thumb. “Pick up! Pick up!” she softly said, bracing against a particularly rough motion. Thank God she didn’t suffer from seasickness.

“Mike? Thank God I got you! Now listen. I don’t have much time. It’s Alas Babylon time. Like in that book we read when we were in high school. Only not nuclear war, Mike. Ice Age! There is an Ice Age coming. Fast. Not like that movie, but fast once it gets started. Our projections are glaciation to 38 degrees Mike! Starting within two years and escalating from there!

“We’re in trouble here. We may not make it. And even if we do, they’ll clamp down on this and keep it a secret. If you tell anyone now they’ll kill you. Don’t let it get you. Don’t let it get you. I have to go now before they catch me. I love you. ‘bye.”

Man! It Is Cold Outside! – Chapter 1

Mike Buncie had his arms crossed in front of his chest. Partly to try to warm himself in the cold, blustery winds of Washington, D. C. in winter. They were also crossed in an unconscious act of protection against the two men standing near. They’d said they wanted to talk to him. He had insisted it be after the funeral. They weren’t happy, but they weren’t willing to force the issue. Not with this many people around. Beverly Buncie was a well liked and respected research meteorologist.

The sounds and sights of the funeral were lost to Mike as he turned his attention inward. Inward to remember the call of the week previous. From Beverly. She was dead. Dead due to an accident on board the vessel on contract to the National Weather Service.

Mike went through the motions at the funeral, and finally it was over. As he walked toward the limousine that would take him back to the funeral home to pick up his old truck, the two men that wanted to talk to him were suddenly foremost in his mind. They stood by the limo.

“Funeral is over. Time to talk,” said one. The taller and stouter of the two. Mike wondered what a round of South African .308 at close range would do to his face.

“Let’s show a little respect,” said the other.

“Thank you,” Mike replied evenly, not meaning it at all. “You have some questions?”

“Why don’t we sit in the limo. It’ll be warmer,” said the second man.

“Here is fine. What about my sister? She died in an accident. I’m sure the crew did everything in their power to prevent it. I’m not going to sue.”

“Look, buddy,” said the first man, stepping close. Menacingly close. Number One, as Mike was beginning to think of him, was a fraction of an inch taller than Mike, and probably thirty pounds heavier. But Mike was sure he could take the man. Just a random thought.

“We need to ask you some questions. Now.” He was still menacing, but Mike didn’t flinch. Number Two didn’t try to interfere this time.

“Let’s see some ID and then you can ask.” Mike wasn’t going to take anything from these two. He was spoiling for a fight, as a matter of fact.

Quickly the two men took out flapped ID cases. They barely gave time for Mike to see them before they were flipped closed and back in their pockets.

“FEMA. That’s good to know.”

The two exchanged a quick glance. “And why is that?” asked Number One.

“All the crap going on. Everyone says, get ID. But I don’t really need to take down your ID numbers, do I. You’re legit.”

“We’re legit, as you said,” said Number Two.

Number One, a half step closer now, eyes glaring, said, “We know you talked to your sister shortly before her death last week. What’d she say?”

“You want to know what my sister said to me, just before her death?”

“That’s what I said, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was. It just surprised me, is all,”

Number Two put a gentle restraining hand on Number One’s arm before he could tear into this little pipsqueak.

“Surprised you? Why is that?”

“I thought all communications from a research vessel were recorded, as a matter of course.”

“That might be true, normally,” Number Two replied. “But in this case the device used was a privately owned satellite telephone.”

“Oh? I didn’t see it in her effects.”

“She borrowed it.” Number One couldn’t take it any longer. “What did she say?” he asked, enunciating the words slowly and distinctly.

“Great diction, by the way. But what she said. You know, I’m kinda of shaken up over all this. Could we go get a drink or something?”

A very ominous Number One tried to tower over Mike, but that extra half inch of height wasn’t quite up to it. “No. Answer the freaking question.”

“Is he allowed to talk like that?” Mike asked Number Two.

Number Two put a somewhat more firm hand on his colleague’s arm.

“Not normally, but you see,” said Number Two, “there is the possibility that Miss Buncie might have passed on some critical piece of data while she was talking to you.”

“Oh, Beverly never talked about her work with me. I hate the weather. Run a farm, you see. Never have the right weather. Someone should do something about it, Beverly always said. That’s what she was trying to do. Learn enough about the weather to be able to change it. Great idea. But I think God had other plans for Beverly.”

“What did she say, exactly?” Number Two asked.

“That the ship was taking a beating and she was worried. Wanted to talk to me, just in case. Prophetic, I guess. She must have been hurt just after that. At least she didn’t suffer, they said. Broke her neck, you see, from a fall down the stairs or whatever they’re called on a ship.”

The misty rain had turned to a hard, cold rain. Water was running off Mike’s fedora in a rivulet.

Menacing Number One had one last question. “That was all she said? Goodbye?”

“Just that and she was scared. “Can we go get that drink now?”

“We’ll take a rain check,” Number Two said. “We have to be going. I’m sorry about your loss. She was a fine woman and a fine meteorologist. The world will be a sadder place for her passing.”

Mike looked at Number Two for long moments, rigid as stone. But he controlled the urge to put him down like the snake Mike suspected he was. Breaking eye contact, Mike opened the door of the limo and climbed in, shutting the door firmly beside him.

“Ready to go back, now, sir?” asked the driver through the open glass of the driver’s compartment.

“No. If you don’t mind. I’d like to wait for a few moments more.”

Watch, he did, as the two FEMA agents went down a swale and up the other side, crossed the road and boarded the black painted Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopter.

“We can go now,” Mike told the driver as the helicopter took off. Mike watched a moment more but the helicopter was flying away, not following the limo. Mike leaned back and thought. He thought a great deal. After all that thinking, he started making plans. He planned all the way back to Wisconsin.

Beverly had made it clear. She wanted him to survive the coming Ice Age, and, though she didn’t say it directly, Mike was sure the ‘they’ that would kill him was FEMA. Of course he couldn’t know for sure. He’d heard the wild weather in the background when Beverly had called, and heard her grunts as she was adjusting to the movements of the ship. But if ‘they’ would kill him for telling, they’d most likely be willing to kill her, too.

He wanted to honor Beverly's wishes, and he had the normal will to live. He didn't owe the world anything. He could do as he wished. And for the moment, he wished to get out of Wisconsin. That would take a while. The large dairy farm and milk processing and cheese plant that had been in the family for generations had been his and Beverly's since their parents' deaths. It would take some time to get it on the market and sell. He could be looking for another place in the mean time, however.

For a while, the thirty-eight degrees Beverly had mentioned in her phone call, Mike had interpreted as the temperature 38 degrees Fahrenheit. It finally dawned on him she had meant 38 degrees north latitude, not that the average temperature would be 38. So he needed to find an area somewhat south of 38 degrees north latitude. That opened up quite a bit of territory.

With atlas and almanac in hand he studied for a few days, finally taking the search to the internet to check some specifics of areas he found. So, the first item was Missouri or Arkansas Ozarks. Far enough south in case Beverly was off a degree or two. Not so far south as to be in the heart that would be settling in the Deep South when this became obvious. Mike wasn't quite sure why he didn't just plan to do the same.

Get a place on the equator and live the easy life. The sale of the dairy farm would provide for him for the rest of his life, if that's what he wanted. But he found himself wanting to beat the ice age, not just accept it. Somehow that would be beating FEMA. He had no other real way to combat what he had thought happened to his sister. Making a new life near the edge of the area of glaciation would go a long ways to satisfying that urge.

He didn't want to rush things, however. Making a mistake could ultimately be fatal. He decided to put his plans in writing. At least an over view.

1. - Missouri/Arkansas Ozarks

2 - Air – shouldn't be a problem there, except it'll be cold as all get out at times.

3 - Water – Needed a reliable supply. Stream... but a stream might freeze up. More likely a well. Maybe two. Artesian would be nice, but not likely. Wind and solar powered pumping.

4 - Food – Can store a lot, but this is essentially for generations. Need home grown food. A self-sufficient farm. Need diversity, but not too much to make it unsustainable. Dual purpose cattle for beef and milk and leather, chickens for meat and eggs, pigs for meat and leather. Hunting? As far vegetables the same thing. Ditto fruits and berries. Some diversity, but KISS. Grain/legumes. Oil crops. Larger fields. Horse drawn, draft animals? Multiple open-pollinated varieties. Green houses for year round production. Storage. Frozen shouldn't be a problem with an ice house, which shouldn't be a problem. Home canned. Dried. LTS food to get through the initial stages. Irrigation. Animal feed. Sprouting machine. Production, seed. Grain grinder/nut & oily grain grinder.

5 - Shelter – Insulated big time. Earth sheltered? Not conventional. Concrete. Concrete block. Straw Bale. Heat – wood definitely. Coal? Maybe. Propane Not manufactured after onslaught. Okay before. Barns. Shop. Garage. Clinic. Meeting hall.

6 - Power – Hydro, solar, wind, diesel gensets Fuel storage, fuel production. Wood, Bio-diesel, alcohol, wood gas, coal, propane.

7 - Hygiene/Sanitation – septic system/burner

8 - Protection – Secrecy! Fortifications – house, barn, approaches. Weapons. Quality 7.62 x 51, 5.56 x 45, .45 ACP, 9mm Para, .357 Mag.

.22 Rimfire. Catch as catch can. Ammo. Lots. Reloading for all calibers. Extra rimfires. Spare parts.

9 - Transportation – Bio-diesel. Diesel vehicles. Alcohol, converted engines, Horses, horse drawn vehicles. Snow/ice vehicles. Snow mobiles, sno-cat. ARGO w/tracks. Spare parts.

10 - Intelligence – Internet, Broadcast TV/Radio, Shortwave Radio, Weather Instrumentation

11 - Tools & Spares – Extensive for both

12 - Safety/Medical – First-aid Kits. Only-aid Kits. Other disasters preparedness equipment.

13 - Finances/Trade Goods – Cash. Gold, silver, diamonds. Trade goods, many items and lots of them.

14 - Entertainment – Broadcast TV/Radio. VHS/DVD's. Music. Instruments. Karaoke

15 - Education – Library, computers, K-12 courses ware, Higher level learning materials.

16 - People/personnel – Alone or family is two generations only. Need more. Doctor, dentist, pharmacist, homeopathic healer, teacher, farmer, butcher/meat cutter. Craft people for things like cheese, bacon, sausage, sewing, all kinds of stuff. Means more housing

Mike added to the list as he thought of additional items that needed more thought, but it was a start. He made additional lists as the weeks passed. He modified the parameters of the property he was looking for once he decided he wanted more people to be involved. How he was going to attract people to move to what amounted to a survivalist camp.

Suddenly it hit him. That was the way to go. Make it a survivalist camp, only not necessarily geared to a new Ice Age, but all sorts of other disasters. The preparations would be the same for most of them, anyway. If the subject came up, it could just be one more disaster they were planning for.

It would be a lot easier, Mike thought, if the land was acquired and much of the land work done. Perhaps a step or two further. Make it a turnkey operation. A safe, productive life in a nearly closed environment in return for specialist services. He smiled as he thought of it. He'd heard that doctors and lawyers were two of the professions that had many people into preparedness. He'd find out. Might need a lawyer to work out the legal aspects of some of it, anyway. How to go about finding one. And the others.

When Mike was back home in Wisconsin, for the monthly signing of the checks, he made an appointment with the attorney that handled the farms needs. "Mr. Jorgensen," Mike asked, "What trade magazines do most lawyers read?"

"Well, son, I'll tell you." He then went into a lengthy explanation describing an abundance of possibilities. Mike finally pinned him down to three national circulation trade magazines for attorneys.

He did the same thing with his doctor. And several other trades as he thought of them. Each magazine got a similar ad.

Looking for a(n) fill in the blank tradesperson interested in a place in a functioning self-sufficient community. Contact Mike at 555.555.5555.

Mike was amazed at the responses he received. It was amazing how many kooks there are getting along in regular society. He narrowed the

fields down with telephone calls and followed up with personal visits to the others. Mike picked two or three good candidates and let them know he would be following up with them when the property was selected. He did get each candidate to fill out a wish list of items they would want on site if they were selected.

The attorney he needed as soon as possible. He'd found a piece of property that looked suitable. He kept coming back to the same name each time he went over the data. Mike found himself doing so with some reluctance, which he couldn't figure out why.

Sara Parker had struck him as a very capable young lady. She seemed to know her way around the legal profession. He had a feeling anything she tackled, so to speak, remained tackled until she wanted it otherwise.

He picked up the telephone and dialed her number. He was almost relieved that a machine picked up the call. He left a message asking her to call him and quickly went on to some other business.

It looked like there were two corporations interested in the dairy operation. Several outfits had submitted proposals, but the two had been within a few dollars of one another. They were also the two highest offers for the property.

Mr. Jorgenson was handling it and would have a firm commitment in a couple of days with the best offer they would get. And it would be a good offer. Both the original offers had been right in there with what Mike was wanting and a minor bidding war should take it up even higher. It was a small mint, but it was going to take a small mint to do what he wanted to do.

The place he envisioned was going to be profitable in a normal economy, more so in the desperate times a short timeline Ice Age would bring. But it wasn't going to be anything like the income from the current farm.

The telephone interrupted his thought process. He answered it. It was Sara Parker. “Yes, Miss Parker. I have a piece of property in mind and I would like you to take a look at the paperwork and see if everything is in order.”

She gave Mike a simple, “I’ll take care of it,” and hung up.

“Maybe she isn’t the right one for this job,” Mike muttered, hanging up the phone. Choosing someone else would have to wait until tomorrow. He was too tired to mess with it today. He didn’t have the money from the sale yet, anyway. That would be a few days.

When he entered his office in the farm office building the next morning someone was waiting, talking to the receptionist. It was Sara Parker. She turned and smiled at Mike. He was suddenly wondering what had brought her to the farm. He was in the process of shaking hands with her when he remembered. She was going to look at the paperwork for the possible purchase of the property in the Ozarks.

“I thought we could go down together and take a look. Get the papers from the seller’s attorney and see what is going on. Does that sound okay?”

Mike could only nod. He suddenly thought, “She sure is forward, for a southern gal.”

Sara was from Georgia, and a peach would blush in shame at her beauty. Mike began to feel a little like a puppy on a leash as Sara took charge, driving them to the airport, getting tickets, guiding them through security and finally getting them settled in their plane after a short wait.

She was quiet when the situation didn’t require speech, but she could sure talk, when warranted. A few words into the start of a discussion about the property and Mike snapped out of his funk and began to

participate in life once again. He'd caught enough of the first few words of her sentence to be able to form a reply.

"I'm not sure I want to go into full detail, just yet, about why I want the property."

"Well, that's pretty obvious, unless you were misleading in your ad. I would not be happy if that was the case."

Mike wanted to say he would do anything to make her happy, but managed to get out, "Well, I suppose it is pretty clear cut. I want to form what is sometimes referred to as an intentional community, only on a tighter scale, if you will. A single large compound comprising an essentially self-sufficient village."

"From what you had said about the property, that's about what I expected. More than a survivalists' compound, but similar. That's why I am interested. I don't use the term survivalist much, since it has such bad connotations due to the mass media. I am a prepper from way back, and this could be a good opportunity to get in on the ground floor of a real retreat. Will the participants have more input than just that list of requirements?"

As much as he wanted to please, he wasn't going to lie about anything. "No. Not really."

"If you charged each person a subscription fee, and let them..."

It was getting easier to not please Sara. "No. I want full control of everything. The individuals have every right to be there or not be there. I'll be open about things, but it's my way or the highway."

"I see," Sara said thoughtfully. She fell silent and seemed to be thinking about things.

Mike stayed silent as well as they flew south at thirty-eight thousand feet.

After a long while Sara spoke again. “I think after we look at the property and I give you my opinion of the purchase, you’d better look for a different attorney. You can rest assured that I will give an honest evaluation about the property.”

“Okay.” Mike felt like his heart was breaking. But he’d get over it. This was too important. It was part of his sister’s legacy.

They changed planes in Kansas City and took a regional line to Springfield, Missouri. From there it was by automobile. Sara was still in charge, making all the arrangements. She drove the rental, relying on the information in the packet that Mike had given to her about the property.

It was late in the day when they reached the site. It was right on the border with Arkansas. Sara had no trouble in the Jeep Wagoneer getting to the property. A logging road stopped at the edge of the property line, according to the information they had.

There was a distinct difference in the look of the trees. The trees along both sides of the logging road were significantly smaller, for the most part, than those in the property. It seemed apparent that the property had not been logged as recently as the rest of the area.

“You’re going to need a new standard survey. The packet has aerial photographs, and a topographic map,” Sara said to him as they walked around the property for a little while. By the time they got back to the Jeep it was getting dark.

“I looked over the photographs and the topo map,” Mike said. “They are what made me decide to try to acquire the property.”

“It does look like it would make an ideal spot for a retreat. I’m not so

sure of the self-sufficiency part, however. It's not what I would call good farm land."

"Green houses, and there are a few ten- to twenty-acre meadows that would lend themselves to grain crops. And I want a good stock of firewood. I'd clear additional fields on the flatter portions. Fence a few acres close to the building site and let the animals forge for themselves for a while until construction is complete."

"Oh. That sounds reasonable. Do you have an idea where you would build?"

"Yes. But it would be easier to show you on the map."

"Oh. Okay. We'll wait until we get back to Springfield and get some supper."

They were both quiet on the trip back, lost in their own thoughts. They checked into a motel and then went to a restaurant, Sara carrying the portfolio with the property information. Both were hungry, so they ate before Sara pulled out the map, opened it and found the piece of property. It was outlined lightly in pencil.

"The land, as we saw, and is indicated on the map, is rolling ground with a couple of bluffs and steep hills. See on the map the existing meadows?"

Sara nodded.

"And this particular rise?"

Again Sara nodded.

"What I'm going to do is cut the top off that hill and put in two 250' x 350' two-story earth sheltered structures built around 100' x 200' atrium

areas. One will be residences and the other will be for storage, and house the animals and support functions. Two fifty-foot earth-sheltered dome structures will house the group's common rooms and such. A couple of smaller structures will be garages and work areas. There should be enough earth in the hill top to do the earth sheltering and to create a leveled area probably a 1000' by 1500', perhaps more, including the buildings.

That's about 35 of the 640 acres with the buildings taking about 5 acres with the berming. Clear another eighty acres for crops, plus the natural meadow... No. We'll fence the meadows for animal grazing in the summer. Clear a total of 160 acres close to the buildings and do all the farming in one area, rotating the crops as needed to keep eighty acres under cultivation, with the rest lying fallow or in green manure in rotation.

Mike pointed to another area close to the hilltop he'd indicated earlier. We'll level this area, too and make the best crop land out of it as we can by incorporating whatever we need into the ground during the process. Do green manure the first couple of years on all of it, and then start planting crops in rotation."

"Lot of terra-forming there," Sara said. "Going to be expensive."

"I'll have the money once the dairy operation sells. It should be enough to do what I want, get things going and keep them going for a couple of years with tenant farmers."

"Sounds like you have a specific timeframe in mind."

Mike had to be careful here. "I want it as fast as I can get it, but I have to be reasonable. I'll be sinking my entire heritage into this, looking for a long range payoff. But look around you. There are things happening every day that could make having this place ready a real boon."

“True,” replied Sara. “If I was you, though, I’d put some of that money from the sale of the farm into something besides this little farm. Be a nice retreat, and should generate some local income, but you’re sure not going to have the lifestyle you have today. Are you sure you want to give up everything you’re giving up?”

“I’m as sure as I can be.”

“You’re convinced we’re going to have war, or collapse of the economy,” Sara said, studying the map.

Mike was glad she wasn’t looking at him. He wasn’t sure if he could have hidden the real reason if she pressed. Because he was on a timetable for something very specific. He wanted the place ready to take up residence in two years.

“This would do nicely for what you want.” Sara’s words brought him out of his short reverie. “And with the detail you’ve already expounded, I guess I can see why you’d want to maintain as much control as you can. I’ve reconsidered and think I can live with that, if I’m still welcome.”

Mike kept it nonchalant, with an effort. “Sure. Why not. You’re part of the official team.” He held out his hand and Sara shook it firmly. The weather that had been threatening during their trip finally broke loose. A gentle snow began to fall outside the restaurant’s windows. Mike saw it as a promise of more.

Man! It Is Cold Out There! – Chapter 2

Jorgensen had good news for Mike when they returned to Wisconsin. The bidding had gone above eleven million. “I don’t think you’re going to do better than that.”

“It’s a million or so more than I was expecting. Accept the tender.” He gave Jorgensen Sara’s number. “She’ll be handling some work in Missouri for me.”

Jorgensen nodded. “I’ll contact her. I guess when this is done that’ll be it.”

It was Mike’s turn to nod. “You’ve been good to us for a long time. We’ve all appreciated it. I wish I could explain better why I’m doing this, but I can’t. I’m not sure the reasons are entirely clear to me.”

“Well, it’s your prerogative.” Jorgensen grinned. “Don’t spend it all in one place.”

Mike could only manage a shallow laugh. He pretty much was going to spend it all on one place, if not in one place.

The survey was completed within two weeks and Sara had negotiated the price of the Ozark land down from five hundred an acre to four twenty-five an acre. That was \$272,000 of the eleven million, plus the odd fee here and there. Mike decided he’d better get used to it.

Sara sent him a standard bill for the work she’d done in helping him acquire the property. “From now on,” she said, “I’ll be doing whatever you need me to do as part of the project. No fees. How about expenses?”

Mike nodded and took the packet of papers Sara handed him. “Call me if you think I can be of any help of any kind. I want this project to work. I think bad times are coming and I want a safe place to relocate to if they arrive.”

Again Mike nodded. “Okay. Thanks.”

Homeless now, albeit someone with eleven million dollars minus the

land costs, Mike looked for a place close to the property. He found a rundown farm on a paved county road. The elderly couple had been wanting to retire for a few years now, and welcomed getting out from under the farm.

Mike hired a contract farmer to tend the fields and moved into the farm house as soon as the previous owners had moved out. Next, Mike contracted a logging outfit to go in and cut trees where he wanted clear land. They would start in the spring and be finished early summer.

It was a strange contract for them, for instead of the trees being hauled and taken to a lumber mill, the trees and larger limbs were to be trimmed out and moved to a storage area that Mike pointed out to them. When asked why, Mike replied, "I like being warm. Firewood." They could think him crazy if they wanted, but they did as he asked.

Always attuned to the weather, having grown up on and then running the dairy operation, Mike watched it with even more diligence than before. Winter ended, more or less as usual, and when the loggers were well into their work, the earth movers he hired started their work. First it was to take out all the stumps left by the loggers. The stumps were gathered into large piles for later use.

The logging road was improved down to the county road, being made into an all weather gravel road with good drainage while one D8 Cat was doing the stumps. The faint remains of another logging road, in much worse shape, but going to another county road, via a couple more logging roads, was improved enough for four-wheel drive vehicles to use, as an alternate in and out.

Finally, with the logging completed and stumps removed, the heavy work of turning a hill into a plateau began in earnest. In the latter stages Mike was taking it for it, or buying all the animal manure and topsoil he could get in a five hundred mile radius to improve the ground. That went with the truckloads of sand that gave the ground better farming

consistency. Fall cover crops were planted over all the terra-formed property to be disked in the following spring when construction could begin. Half a dozen large stockpiles of the local dirt mixed with sand for use as fill for the earth sheltered construction remained.

Mike took a large travel trailer up to the site and had a large propane tank installed. He'd live there until the place was completed. When the forecasts for the winter started indicating that it would be a bad one, Mike had wind breaks built around the trailer. The one-ton GMC diesel dually four-wheel-drive pickup that he'd used to haul the travel trailer up with became his primary transportation. He needed the truck to get in and out of the place that winter.

He did quite a bit of traveling during the winter months, wheeling and dealing for all sorts of acquisitions for the project. Not the least was working with the architect on the design of the buildings that would be constructed. It was unusual enough to see earth sheltering on this scale, much less with every housing unit having three types of heat.

Each of the apartments and other human spaces had natural gas heaters, as well as dual fuel wood/coal heaters. Kitchens were set up the same way. Natural gas ranges, with wood/coal back up stoves. It had cost a premium to get a natural gas line run to the property, but Mike had thought it worthwhile.

Mike went to some of the best horse ranches in the country to arrange for quality animals for the place, both draft animals and riding/harness stock. He did the same thing for the other farm animals. He made deals with various breeders for genetic diversity so they could do cross breeding for several years to come without endangering their herds and flocks, just as he'd done for the horses. There would be breeding animals as well as production stock for milk cattle, beef cattle, swine, laying chickens, and meat chickens. With the help of agri-business specialists working with the architect, the second earth-sheltered structure was designed to handle the large animal population the estate

would have.

In a similar vein, he visited fruit and nut tree orchards and bought for future transplant, trees just coming into bearing age. They would be transplanted during the last construction phase.

After locating a museum with a noteworthy collection of antique farm implements, Mike contracted their staff to help him find enough appropriate horse drawn equipment to work a 320 acre farm. He didn't need that much, but he wanted spares. Then he essentially bought a machine shop and steel supply operation to keep the equipment and everything else at the estate in operating condition for years.

All the construction contractors were chomping at the bit to get started the following spring, but it was slow in coming. It wasn't unusual in itself, for there had been later springs. This one just had more precipitation than usual, even for a late spring.

But spring did arrive and work started, with several projects going at once. There was a hill to the north of the building site that Mike had, as an afterthought, had cleared of trees. A new virtual forest of 300 watt photovoltaic panels went in with banks of massive submarine batteries. The batteries were placed in a large earth sheltered structure that also housed four natural gas/propane engine generators, any two of which would supply the power needs of the estate, with the energy conservation attributes being built into the structures. The building had all the main electrical switch gear for the estate, to run on commercial power, solar power, or generator power.

Four deep wells were drilled, two within the confines of the footprint of the buildings. One of the other wells was at the corner of the crop area for irrigation and had its own triple power station of solar, generator, and commercial electric. The fourth well was inside the foot print of the power station building and piped to both the crop well location, and to the buildings.

Just as water is needed to sustain human and animal life, so is waste disposal. Three small scale sewage digesters were obtained to handle the waste effluent of the humans and animals to turn it into useable methane gas.

Six ten-thousand gallon propane tanks were delivered and set in a fuel bunker area as backup to the natural gas. Conversions from natural gas to propane were obtained for every gas appliance. Next came four ten-thousand gallon diesel tanks and two ten-thousand gallon gasoline tanks. The tank farm contained other smaller tanks for other fuels, oils and the equipment needed to handle such things. Close by was the building for the stills that would produce alcohol for vehicles. The alcohol produced would be perfectly fine for human consumption, but that wasn't a factor in the installation. A pair of bio-diesel production units were also installed, along with the oil presses that would be needed to extract the oil from crops grown specifically for diesel production.

The foundations and support buildings were installed for twenty large greenhouses, which would produce much of the food for the estate, with enough left over to sell as truck farm produce. Four of the greenhouses were large enough to handle trees that couldn't grow in the current climate, much less the coming climate.

Mike kept himself available to inspect the construction as it progressed and sign off on projects when they were complete. And write checks. Lots of big checks. But it was going about as expected. And with the performance bonuses Mike had seen were written into the contracts, people were getting the job done on time or early. They were doing a good job, Mike's frequent inspections saw to that.

There were a lot of comments about the tunnels going in with concrete pedestrian underpass units to connect all the different buildings that were not built side by side.

Sara came out once during the summer and stopped in to see the progress. Mike didn't have much time for her, but she looked around on her own wearing muddy steel toed boots and a hardhat. She seemed satisfied and left smiling.

It was good that Mike had included the bonuses, because had not the last contractor finished up early the way he did, the early winter would have caught him putting on the finishing touches, the last of the sod around the buildings.

Mike moved the Chevy and the trailer into the cavernous garage next to the dome that contained his living quarters and moved in. Permanently. Though he's seen them as they'd gone up he'd been here and there seeing details. He hadn't really got a good look at everything as a whole. He decided to look it over and see what it all really looked like.

There really wasn't much to see from outside. The occasional small window of the domes. The large garage type doors in tunnel ends that broke the easy slope of the earth berming. It was the same on all the buildings.

Mike found the tunnel access in his dome and went to the power house. It was quiet with the commercial power going. He touched the switches that would bring on the power of the generators and solar arrays. All three sources of power were synchronized to allow any combination of the three to run the estate. He made the long walk to the tank farm building. Everything was in readiness.

Ditto the two long greenhouse support buildings, each with five greenhouses winging off on each side. It took a long time to walk to the equipment building at the nearest point of the crop grounds. And just as long to walk back after looking at the empty building. The equipment would be there the next spring if all went as planned. For now the farmer he'd hired had his mechanical equipment stored in it. The cover crop was again growing and would be disked in the following spring, along

with more mulch and manure to build the crop land up.

Mike walked through the empty housing unit, stopping and checking a few of the apartments. He looked out over the atrium with its large pool and open green areas. Next he went to the barn building. The lower section was for the animals, with the upper section for support functions and processing rooms. When he could find suitable animal handlers he would start bringing in the animals. There were already stocks of grain and hay for the animals in the lofts and the automated feed, water, and waste systems were ready to go. They would make caring for the animals much easier, quicker, and more efficient.

The three fodder machines were ready for seed. They would produce nutritious spouted grain fodder feed on a continuous basis. The three machines were long conveyors in which seed was placed in one end, and the finished sprout mats would come out the other end to be cut into portions and fed to the animals that did well with fresh feed. Greenhouse space would be allotted to grow the grains to seed stage to feed the fodder machines.

Mike went through the second of the two domes. The clinic and small hospital, dental office, pharmacy, and similar facilities were in it, along with other task rooms, including school rooms, study areas, and a library.

Finally Mike entered the first dome. It was the command, control, communications, and intelligence center. It also contained Mike's living quarters. He looked over the gleaming installation that would someday be the hub of the entire operation. If things went as planned. Mike went to bed satisfied he'd done all he could for the moment.

The next morning, in his large office off his living quarters, he began to the final phase of populating the center. Despite the fact that only in the last stages of understanding that an Ice Age was upon them would many

of the people come here. He touched base with the candidates and informed them that they were still in contention. He invited each one out to see the place. At their expense. On a whim he called Sara and told her the project was finished and invited her to come out, too.

Others Mike wanted here as soon as possible, just to maintain the estate at a level of readiness that would allow a quick integration of the rest of the people he had selected. He used the telephone and computer all morning, and then fixed himself a light lunch, before resuming work.

The afternoon was spent with paper and internet catalogs, ordering a myriad of items with which to equip the facility. He checked his bank balances on-line. The eleven million had dwindled to five million after the orders had gone in.

It was nearly dark and the weather instruments told him that it 31 degrees F. outside with twenty mile an hour winds when the annunciater went off that told him someone was on the gravel road into the place.

Mike picked up the Para-Ordinance P-14 pistol lying on the desk top in an inside the waistband holster. He slipped it into place, put on his jacket and headed downstairs to the main entrance doors. He waited at the outer doors of the air-lock entry for whoever it was to park and come in.

He held the door open and said, "Hello. Come in out of the weather." It was starting to snow a little. Very unusual this early in the year.

"How can I help you?" Mike asked, leading the way into the small reception area.

"Jeremiah Johnson. Like the famous one, only no relation. Buddy of mine told me about this place. Worked here with one of the contractors. Said you were going to have a farm and needed a work foreman."

"Well, I'm not sure how he got that idea," Mike said. This didn't feel

right.

“Well, from what I can see of it, which isn’t much, which tells me, from how much work Barney said was done, this is a large scale survival retreat, with most of it underground. Gonna need a farm to be self-sustaining. Just logical.”

Mike noticed the man was watching him closely as he spoke. Studying his face. “For the new Ice Age that’s coming.”

It was about what Mike had suspected. Number One and Number Two weren’t satisfied. Mike’s actions would have been easy to track. So he was ready. Mike chuckled. “Ice Age? I watch the Weather Channel all the time. They’ve not said anything about a new Ice Age. I reckon they’d know. So would the National Weather Service. Haven’t heard anything on the news about it. That would be big.”

“Oh, I’m quite sure there is one coming. From my own sources. Why else would you build this place? You must have sources, too.”

“Well, sure, I have sources. I’m on half a dozen... actually nine emergency preparedness sites, most with forums. That’s part of the reason I started this. Do you know how many different things can happen that will disrupt normal civilization? The possibility of war with China that started making the forums a couple of years ago started it.

“Ice Age, huh? I sold the family farm in Wisconsin to get to somewhere warmer. I’ve never liked bad weather. If you really know something. Have some kind of inside track, you should contact FEMA. They’re the agency that would need to start the ball rolling to prepare people for it. I’ll stick to my nuclear wars and biological attacks.

“But I tell you what, I’ll take your résumé. I am actually looking for some farmer types.” Mike softened his voice and leaned forward to half whisper, “This is kind of a retreat, but I’d just as soon it didn’t get

around.” A sudden thought occurred to him. “Gotta keep the rif-raff out. This is a subscription facility. Got to pay in to get in. It is negotiable, based on qualifications.”

The man frowned. “I see. I don’t think I’m prepared to take that step. Thank you for seeing me.” He didn’t quite storm out, but it was close.

Mike held his smile until the man’s car turned around and was heading off the property. Then it turned into a frown. “Those two FEMA goons are up to something.” He did smile again when he thought of what he’d told ‘Jeremiah’. “That’s not a bad idea.” It had come up before. He went to bed, mulling the idea over in his head.

The next morning he set about implementing the new concept. He called a graphics design house he knew about and set up a meeting for three days hence. He would need to get a guard in here to watch the place now that he needed to be gone occasionally, before he got residents.

It took a month to get some nice brochures printed up. Sara came out to see the place finished during a break in the weather. Mike told her then. “What do you think? You still want in?”

“This stinks! How much?”

“Depends on the qualifications. Or, to put it bluntly, anything I ask. I told you I wanted full control. But I’m having some difficulty getting people interested. It occurred to me that if the person had to pay, they might think it more worth it, than a free association. But to avoid misunderstandings, I’m going to need a contract and CC&R written up. Obligations on each side. Minimum and maximums they can bring into the place. Required equipment and such. You seem to know quite a bit about emergency preparedness. Can you run up something for me to take a look at?”

A sweet smile, with a steel lining appeared on Sara’s face. “If that’s my

cost in. And I'll submit to the contract and CC&R."

Mike grinned and then laughed. "Done."

There had been nothing in the initial contacts with specific people that precluded the approach Mike was now taking. Sara e-mailed Mike the first drafts three weeks later. By Christmas time they were finalized. Mike spent Christmas through New Years alone at the facility, going over the information he had on people that had expressed an interest in being a part of the project.

He decided he had enough money to hire a staff to begin the animal activities and greenhouse operations. That meant he would need to keep the road open for safety. And access, too, since they would be getting items in from time to time. Mike bought a Caterpillar roadgrader, a D8 crawler tractor, 966 loader, and the first of several Unimog U500 utility trucks. This first one had a snow blower. The deal he cut included four more with a selection of attachments for them.

When he heard a radio announcement of the Bobcat 5600T it intrigued him. They were so versatile, like the Unimogs, he wound up buying four of the Toolcats and four of the Bobcat A300 skid steer/4-wheel steer units for the facility for the lighter work. With the Unimogs, which could be used like tractors, they would be the main equipment for when fuel was available and horses weren't.

Mike ran ads in agricultural college newspapers for long term positions at the facility for post graduate students. There would be pay, not a lot, but enough with room and board and use of the facilities to make it an attractive proposition. He began to get responses from the ads. With the various disasters being reported, and the strange weather, he began to get a few serious inquiries from a few of the people he had contacted earlier.

Those he wanted, though they agreed to the contract and the CC&R, Mike furnished at reduced cost the prerequisites the documents

stipulated. Most of those that came and saw the facility signed on quickly. He managed to find a few that would take up residence in early spring. Enough to start operations. Others would be transporting the things required in the spring but would take up residence only when they deemed their personal situation warranted. Mike breathed a sigh of relief. Things were coming together. And he still had some money left.

There was no spring that year. The winter weather stopped and summer weather started. Mike was glad he'd brought those students in that had agreed to come for the start up of the greenhouse operations. The horses were coming in and though some had been trained to harness, there was a great deal of work left to do to get the horse herds to the shape he wanted them.

The actual production animals had arrived and that was going well. Several of the former students turned real farmers rapidly got the hang of the equipment and operation. So did the animals.

The refurbished and recreated horse-drawn farming equipment arrived one muddy Monday morning on three tractor trailer rigs. The front forks mounted on the Unimogs made short work of the unloading. The farmers got them moved over to the farm equipment shed. The horses handled the task admirably. Mike was pleased. As soon as the ground was dry enough the actual field farming could begin. Everything else they would need would be in stock by the end of the week.

Mike was watching the news every day, waiting for the story to break about the coming Ice Age. Still nothing, except, 'exceptional weather' from both the Weather Channel and the National Weather Service. Mike wondered what FEMA was doing. What they were up to. How could they let this go without warning the people.

The emergency preparedness forums on the internet were full of it. The speculation of another Ice Age was rampant. "If they only knew," Mike said softly as he turned off his personal laptop and got ready for bed.

The next Monday was going to be a busy one.

Not only was Sara arriving, so was the shipment of arms and ammunition Mike had ordered the previous fall for delivery now. That had allowed the national distributor he'd contracted with to find everything Mike wanted.

Individuals were welcome to bring whatever weapons they wanted, in fact, were required to furnish a semi-auto long arm to help defend the facility if needed in time of crisis. That had been a stumbling block with some of the students. They refused to have any dealings with firearms. They weren't selected.

It had come up with a few of the people Mike had contact with from other walks of life. A few, like several of the students, wanted nothing to do with guns, even for their own safety. A few more were willing to pitch-in and provide a weapon. For someone else to use. Mike was committed for the operation to be as fair and equitable as possible. If you could help out somewhere, you would. The safety of the facility was everyone's responsibility. Every housing unit had a gun safe.

There were a few exemptions for lack of ability to use a weapon, but everyone that was over sixteen and was healthy would be required to shoot occasionally and participate in the defense of the facility if it ever became necessary.

Sara had arrived shortly before the delivery van with the weapons and ammunition and watched as it was unloaded. Everything was taken to an armory room in Mike's building. Rack after rack of several different military and hunting style weapons were filled. Sturdy shelves held accessories and the ammunition.

A separate delivery of reloading components would arrive in a few days. They would be stored in the room next to the armory with the reloading equipment already there. Working supplies of powder and primers

would be kept in safety cabinets in the reloading room. The rest would be stored in a bunker at the outer edge of the facility.

“Looks like we’ll be ready for trouble,” Sara said. She held up a gun case. “I brought my own.”

“Take whichever housing unit you want,” Mike said, signing off on the delivery. Of all the things he had bought or was buying, he hoped the weapons would be the least used. But he wasn’t counting on it. That’s why he had them and why the contracts read as they did. At some point in time, when things became obviously bad, he expected the facility would need to be protected from outsiders. “Or FEMA,” he muttered under his breath. Jeremiah’s appearance was still bothering him.

“You need some help?” Mike asked Sara as the delivery people left. “We have some carts available to move personal belongings.”

“If you don’t mind,” Sara replied. “I don’t have much but some of it is a bit awkward to carry. And that’s a pretty good ways to carry stuff.”

Mike laughed. “Everyone here should be in good shape, after they been here for a while. Riding the horses inside isn’t allowed, so you have to walk.”

Sara smiled, and Mike followed her to the housing unit she’d picked out. She was single and didn’t have that much stuff she was bringing, so Sara had chosen one of the small efficiency apartments. She probably would have chosen it anyway, but the contracts read that each family unit would use the smallest housing practical for them.

There were a hand full of large four-person dorm rooms for same sex singles that relied on the facility for most of their needs, to one-person efficiencies, up to four bedroom, three bath apartment units for families with children. So far the family units were unoccupied. Most of the former college students had opted for the dorms. They were sharing

cooking chores in the community kitchen, as well as cleanup.

Sara put the cased long arm in the gun-safe. Mike showed her some of the features of the apartment and they headed back to the parking garage to get the rest of her things. They'd just come back down to the reception area when a car pulled up outside. They could see it on the parking lot monitor behind the reception counter. No one was expected and the two exchanged a glance. It was a FEMA vehicle. Not one of the unmarked black ones, but a marked four-wheel drive SUV.

The not so subtle motion of Mike hitching his pants slightly where the holster resided did not go unnoticed by Sara as Mike walked toward the entryway.

"Good morning," Mike said, courteously, holding the inner door of the airlock entryway open. "How can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Mike Buncie. I'm told he is in charge of this place. Amanda Trotter. I'm with the Federal Emergency Management Agency."

"So I gathered, from your vehicle. I'm Mike Buncie. What can I do for you?"

"I've been instructed to seek your assistance in a matter."

Mike drifted toward the reception counter and Sara. "What matter would that be?" Mike asked, leaning against the counter.

With a quick glance at Sara, Amanda said, "It might be better if we discuss this in private."

"Sure. Come up to my office. Follow me." He looked at Sara. "Could you hold down the fort? I'm expecting more things to come in today." Sara nodded.

Mike led the way up the stairs, and then into his office. “What is this all about?”

“I can’t divulge very much, but I need to ask you about a meeting you had with two people with FEMA shortly after your sister died. What was discussed?”

“That was over two years ago. I’m not sure I remember.”

“You do remember the meeting?”

“Black helicopter and all,” replied Mike. He couldn’t keep all the distrust from his voice.

“Yes. That would be the meeting. Can you remember any of the conversation?”

“They were asking me questions about what my sister might have said to me during our last conversation before her death.”

“I see. That is the information we have, but can you be more specific?”

“Sure,” Mike’s voice was even. “She wasn’t sure the ship was going to make it through the bad weather. She wanted to talk to me, just in case.”

Amanda referred to a small notebook she took from her bag. She looked up. “Have either of them contacted you since?”

Mike shook his head. And then he hesitated. This Amanda seemed straightforward. “Actually though, I think they might have tried, just the other day.”

“Tried?” Amanda frowned. “What do you mean?”

“A guy stopped by and asked about a job here. Very strange. Kept insinuating that I built this place for something like nefarious reasons. Not just because of all the trouble in the world. He mentioned an Ice Age several times. Is there something that FEMA isn’t telling the world, Miss Trotter?” Mike’s last sentence had an edge to it.

Amanda looked up a bit startled. She frowned. “That’s what we’re trying to determine,” she said. “But I’d appreciate if you didn’t mention that to anyone. What was this man’s name? The one that contacted you.”

“Jeremiah Johnson.”

Amanda looked at her notes again and her frown became deeper. “I see. There is a connection, but I’m afraid I can’t say what it is. If any of the three men contact you again would you please contact me?” Amanda took a card from her bag and handed it to Mike across his desk. “Or if you can think of anything else that might think helpful.” She stood and Mike did as well. She offered her hand and Mike shook it.

“Thank you for your help in this matter. I can find my way out.”

“That’s okay. I need to go back down, anyway.”

They walked silently back down to the reception desk. Sara was talking to someone at the counter. Amanda stopped at the double glass doors. “I wish you the best of luck with this place. I wish places like this weren’t necessary, but I fear they are. You aren’t the only one preparing for the worst.”

“The worst what?” Mike asked.

“We don’t know. And that has several of us very worried. Thank you again for your time.” With that she was gone, out the doors and headed for her vehicle.

Sara called Mike over. “This man has a sizeable delivery for you and is expecting a C.O.D. check.”

Mike got lost in the daily routine and forgot about Amanda Trotter. For the moment.

With the news on, while he was having supper, Mike’s ears perked up when he heard a news blurb. He quickly turned up the volume.

“The Tip Line is open for any information available from the public about a black Suburban with damage to the right rear quarter-panel. Do not try to interfere if you see this vehicle. It was used in what appears to be an attempted murder by use of a motor vehicle.”

The text scrolling under the graphics listed Springfield, Missouri as the location. The heavily damaged small SUV carried the FEMA logo.

“Hum,” Mike said, mostly under his breath.

Man! It Is Cold Outside! – Chapter 3

Mike made a few inquiries in Springfield and found out that Amanda had been treated and released after the intentional hit-and-run accident outside of Springfield. It made him wonder about things.

He didn’t wonder much. He was starting to get more and more responses from the contacts he’d made. Among the various ongoing terrorist scares, impending pandemics, the whole gamut of natural disasters, not to mention serious tensions between China and the United States over Taiwan, the severity of the weather was becoming a more and more mentioned topic.

Most of those seeking the shelter of the facility were looking at it for

short term protection. But not all. One dentist, who'd made a fortune in the stock market decided to retire to the facility for the foreseeable future. He'd honor his contract to furnish dental services for free, for his time in the facility. Plus a hefty membership fee.

Others weren't ready to take up residence, but with the facility more an ongoing process now, they were ready to buy their way in, with entry to the facility at a later date.

Out of the blue one day, Sara, who besides some cyber work-at-home activity for the legal firm she was associated with, was taking care of the reception desk during regular business hours, helping coordinate the deliveries of incoming supplies and equipment.

Word of mouth had spread to the local communities, and people were showing up hoping for jobs at the facility. Though Mike wasn't hiring people that weren't going to live on site, he did find one or two retired people that were living on pensions and wanted something to do. He found a couple of ladies that were willing to take care of the communal kitchen for their room and board, keeping their retirement income for pocket money. They were exempted from the need to be armed.

The one retired farmer that showed up one day wasn't. He was an elderly gentleman, but he had lots of experience with Ozark hills farming and working with draft animals. He was a welcome addition to the family, giving the former students real hands-on experience in running a working animal farm.

Though it was the middle of summer now, which was obvious in the Ozarks, Canada was having a rough time of it. There were areas where the snow had not melted by late July and a few areas it looked like it wouldn't melt even into August.

The Weather Channel and National Weather Service were now talking climate change due to global warming, with the effect being highly

variable weather with extremes of both summer weather and winter weather. The federal governments of several nations were launching inquiries, especially the northern governments, including Canada and much of Europe.

Mike was beginning to wonder when they would catch on that this wasn't a simple extreme in the weather. Now that the place was up and running, he was tempted to tempt fate and go public with what he knew. But reading the preparedness forums on a daily basis there were already people crying Ice Age. They weren't getting any more attention than anyone else. He'd just be considered a kook. He had no real proof. His sister was dead and buried almost three years. Whoever had wanted her work suppressed would have had plenty of time to do a good job of it. But there was Amanda Trotter. Apparently not all of FEMA was in on the information suppression.

It took quite a while to track her down in the Agency. In fact, it was in the middle of the worst winter on record since the Little Ice Age days of the 14th century to the mid-19th century. Those at the facility were glad they were there. The green houses were producing fruits and vegetables, and the old Ozarks farmer had taken over the butchering chores of the animals, with the cooks handling the meat from there, to provide a good table at every meal.

There were three entertainment rooms, along with game rooms in the second dome, where people could relax together, if they didn't want to stay in their own quarters and entertain themselves there.

The Ozarks were getting what Iowa used to get. Iowa was like Canada, and the Arctic had taken up residence in Canada.

Mike saw to it that the facility road was kept clear with the road grader, D-8 dozer, and 966 front end loader, but the county was unable to keep up with the snow for a while. The facility was snowed in at that time.

Though several had brought cars to the facility, which were nice and safe in the earth-sheltered garage, they didn't even think about using them in the weather they were having. When the roads were passable any activity of the property was done in the small fleet of four-wheel-drive vehicles Mike had provided for the facility.

There were patches of snow on the ground on the shaded north sides of things at the facility into April. In Jefferson City, Missouri the shaded north sides of building held snow until July. Only in late July and Early August did everything completely melt. It was worse the further north you went.

Those already at the facility were glad they were there. Others were making their preparations to get there.

Mike called Amanda in late August. "It's Mike Buncie. I've something to tell you," Mike said when Amanda picked up the phone on her end and identified herself.

"Go ahead," she said.

"Not on the telephone. Especially considering your accident. They never found the perps, did they?"

"As a matter of fact, no. I think you are being ridiculous, but perhaps there is an element of justification to your mistrust. I'm quite able to travel. I'll be there in a couple of days."

"Watch your back."

"I'll have a couple of people with me to help."

It didn't dawn on Mike for a few seconds after he hung up that she might mean Number One and Number Two. They might have got to her and turned her to their side. He told himself it was just his paranoia. Aloud

he said, “Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you.”

Mike checked the P-14 and made a mental note to keep it handy the next few days. As he’d been wearing his most of the time, a few of the others in the facility had begun going armed, too. That included many of those working outdoors with the animals and for other reasons.

Part of the reason Mike had chosen the spot he had, and had developed it the way he had, was because they were in a natural defensive zone. Other than the good access road, and the marginal road that was their back door, all of the surrounding area was heavily wooded. That meant quite a few people could get up to within a few hundred yards of them, but nothing powered, except perhaps a dirt bike or ROKON.

All the structures were earth-sheltered, with parapet walls extending six feet above the roofs. A backing wall with cantilevered roof projecting over the walkway by the parapet would protect anyone manning the parapets from the weather. Anyone approaching from the forest would be an easy target for riflemen on the parapets. It would take an overwhelming force of people to work their way through the forest and a massive charge to take the facility. No place was invulnerable.

A handful of men might, using stealth, get to the buildings. But part of the contract was a no bargaining clause. Anyone caught and used for hostage had an obligation to aid any attempt to free them using force. And force would be used. There would be no negotiations.

Mike put it out of his mind. He’d just see what developed when Amanda showed up.

Between incoming supplies and equipment, which Mike felt he should personally check, since he’d ordered everything, and people showing up and others applying for membership, he was kept busy. He’d made sure to make his schedule flexible for the day she was scheduled to arrive. He

also made sure Sara was going to be elsewhere. In fact, she was part of the team taking vehicles to Springfield for an auction. Several people had decided to sell their personal vehicles and rely on the facilities fleet.

Mike breathed a slight sigh of relief when Amanda showed up with two men, neither of which was Number One or Number Two. She told them to wait in the lobby area while she went with Mike up to his office. She was using a cane to support herself.

“Do you wear a gun on you all the time?” Amanda asked as soon as Mike had shown her to her seat. “Does everyone?”

“Not everyone. But most. Part of the contract for living here is a commitment to defend the place.” Mike responded in a conversational tone. He could tell that Amanda was badly stressed.

“You don’t look well,” he said. “Are you up to this?”

Amanda sighed. “I have to be. I’ve been tasked with finding out what is going on.”

“So you admit that something is going on?”

This time Amanda frowned. “Yes. There is a problem. One we are trying to correct before anyone else gets hurt. You act as though you’ve known for some time.”

“Well, I can tell you one thing. Three years ago I knew something was going on. Apparently so did my sister. I think she was killed for having that knowledge.”

Amanda’s face fell. “I hate to say this, but we are beginning to believe that may be the case. But we don’t have any hard evidence. And we don’t know exactly why.”

“Because she knew an Ice Age was coming. A little slowly at first, then more rapidly. With glaciation to 38 degrees North Latitude.”

“So it is true...” Amanda’s words faded away.

“Yes. She told me on that last phone call. Before she was killed. I don’t know if it was done on board, or if it was after they made port. I do know the ship made port. They say she was killed in an accident aboard the ship, but I’m thinking they found out what they wanted to know from her research and then killed her and just said it was an accident. That was what the inquest said. That it was an accident. I doubted it from the first.

“Then, when Number One and Number Two questioned me about that last phone call... their attitudes... demanding. Wanting to come right out and ask about an Ice Age, but talking around it. And then Jeremiah, actually trying to put the words in my mouth. They had orders to keep the coming Ice Age quiet. They were working for someone. Not themselves. Though they did seem to enjoy it immensely. Someone, I think within FEMA, has been trying to keep it quiet for as long as they could.”

“I don’t suppose I should tell you this, but FEMA has come to the same conclusion. We don’t have the proof that your sister apparently had, but with the way the weather has been, and some of the modeling our meteorologists have been doing are saying the same thing. That an Ice Age is coming, and coming quickly.

“The person we think was responsible for the men you’ve referred to as Number One and Number Two, Tom Harris and Billy Bonestall, has been arrested and is being questioned in Washington. He seems to have been working with a group outside of FEMA. We still don’t know who. And it seems it was only the three. We’ve not found any connection with anyone else in FEMA to account for your Jeremiah. But there is the link outside the agency.

“It appears that this outside group had plans to use the Ice Age to ‘Cleanse the earth of Undesirables,’ as it was put by Oliver Blackwood. He’s the FEMA agent we’ve arrested. We’re still looking for Harris and Bonestall. We’ll add the murder of your sister to their list of crimes. I don’t know if we’ll be able to prove it, but we’ll add it. We don’t know where they are at the moment. Some agency equipment, including a helicopter, is missing from inventory. I think they are the ones that tried to kill me by causing my accident.”

“I agree,” said Mike. “And I think they may try again.”

“Well, I have two US Marshals with me to try and prevent that. I’d like to get you some protection, but even with what you have told me, I don’t think it’ll happen. This is being kept very hush, hush. Very low profile.”

“I understand. I can’t deny that part of the reason I go armed is on the off chance I run into Number One and Number Two again. We have a few differences of opinion to settle.” Mike’s face was grim.

“Don’t do something silly, Mr. Buncie. FEMA is working on the problem with the help of the Marshals Service and the FBI. We’ll find them and bring them to justice.”

Mike waved it away. “What about the population? Are they going to get the word? An organized evacuation of points north needs to be started before it is too late.”

“I’m afraid it is already too late for some,” Amanda said softly. “I don’t have the power to bring it to the world’s attention. That will be up to my superiors. To be honest, I think they will. Seems everyone is speculating on just such a theory, now anyway. They’ll just take the speculation away.”

She adjusted herself in the chair. Amanda was obviously in some pain

from her injuries resulting from the hit and run accident. “If there isn’t anything else you can tell me, I’ll be on my way.”

“No. That was it. Just my suspicions and what my sister had told me.”

Amanda nodded and began to get up from the chair. The thought just occurred to Mike and he decided to ask. “Is this Ice Age the natural progression from global warming, or is it man-made. By the population cleansing people?”

Her reaction was so normal to the question that Mike was sure it had come up before. She didn’t deny the possibility. “We don’t know. We simply don’t know,” Amanda said.

She switched the cane to her left hand, held out her right and Mike shook it.

“Be careful,” they both said, almost simultaneously. With a laugh, a nice one, Mike noted, Amanda transferred the cane back to her right hand and Mike escorted her down to her Marshals.

“Quite a set up, you’ve got here, according to a couple of the residents,” one of the men said. “You taking applications?” Mike gave him a business card. The other Marshal laughed, but it had a hollow ring to it.

Mike slowly followed them outside. He looked up, shading his eyes with his hands. It was hard to believe that an Ice Age was coming on this beautiful sunny summer day in the Ozarks. When Sara got back and found out Amanda had been there Mike thought she seemed angry. And couldn’t figure out why.

It was no longer a beautiful sunny summer day in the Ozarks, Mike thought, remembering his thought that day. It was September and there was snow on the ground and more coming. A line of vehicles was

coming up the road. The President had gone on the air two days previously and announced the discovery that an Ice Age was in the process of occurring. People in the northern latitudes would be evacuated as places to house them were found. There was already fighting on the Mexican border where the Mexican army was trying to stop the minor invasion of Northerners headed for warmer climes.

Ever since the announcement, a stream of people that knew about the facility had been calling, and then showing up. People were offering huge sums of money for entrance. Mike was taking it, when it was a person he would have brought in anyway. He knew many of them would leave the next summer, when things looked better and the government's warning was ignored. The payment was non-refundable.

There were guards out, very obviously carrying weapons. So far, only those invited were showing up. There was a chance that some of the locals, now that they knew of the place, might come up and try to get in.

When April rolled around, a full quarter of those that had come in upon the government's announcement left, sheepishly. Some demanded their money back. None got it. The contract had been very specific. A tiny handful announced that they were only going home to tie up a few loose ends and would be back before winter set in again. Mike found that more than acceptable.

He was very pleased with the way the facility had run at 50% capacity for those few weeks. All the bugs had been worked out of the systems, few that there had been. He expected to still be able to get supplies for a while, though much was being devoted to the evacuations.

The national plan wasn't going that well. Like some of the residents of the facility, many in the northern latitudes, around the world, refused to believe the information and warnings. Mike had everyone required to bear arms practicing on a regular basis. The following winter, Mike was

thinking, would not be as easy as the first. He knew his sister very well. How her mind worked. The two years of slow build up had occurred, four years ago. Mike figured this would be the year it really got bad.

He topped fuel tanks, and packed all the supplies he could into the regular above ground storage rooms. The basements of all the structures had been filled first. Mike had nearly a million dollars left. He converted nine-tenths of it to gold, silver, and diamonds. The rest would pay for the rest of the supplies that might be obtained.

The world turned, as it was wont to do, and fall fell. Winter was right on its heels. And it was, indeed, a bad one. People began to return to the facility. That's what it was referred to as, now. The Facility. Mike was selective as to who he let in. The county had begun stationing an SUV with two deputies at the entrance of The Facility for a while when Mike was regularly calling in people demanding entrance he didn't want in. Some of them were local. They seemed to take it harder than those that had traveled some distance to get there. The government had not mentioned the 38th parallel. Mike didn't know why.

Mike was being conservative on the personnel he was allowing in. He was going to cut the occupancy off at 85%. There would need to be room for the population to grow. After.

And as the world is wont to do, it continued to turn. A short spring, and a summer, even at 38 degrees. The snow on the north side of the capital building in Jefferson City, Missouri from the previous winter was still there when it started to snow again there in July. Mike let a select few more people in during July and August. The roads were impassible to most vehicles by then. Definitely only four-wheel-drive vehicles were moving on the highways. Mike gave the message to quit plowing the road in to the facility.

He retired to his office for the afternoon. All the security monitors were on. He was dozing when a call awakened him. "Sir, I have clandestine

movement near the out road.” The ‘out’ road was the commonly used name for the poorly maintained logging road that was also known as the back door to the place.

Mike moved over to the monitors mounted along the wall of his office and studied them for a few moment. Yes. There it was. Movement. And it wasn’t the direct movement of someone wanting to be seen. One of Mike’s concerns had been security without massive fences. It had been obvious that shortly into the Ice Age, where they were located, there wasn’t going to be much in the way of risk. They were on the edge of survivability.

He’d had experts tell him how experienced people would attack the place if one came. It had been as he’d thought. Other than an army and an air force, only mass attack out of the woods, or a small group using modern stealth techniques could approach the facility, as long as a careful watch was maintained. Someone seemed to know what they were doing. You had to know it was happening to see it. The computer software that scanned video for motion was the best on the market. It had alerted the guard before the men had moved more than a few feet out of the forest.

Mike knew the path they would take. It was the only reasonable one and had been left as an enticement. He touched the P-14 on his belt and lifted the telephone. “Scramble Squad. Meet me at the front doors.”

He slipped into his jacket and met the six person team of former police and military. Including one ex-US Marshal. “Follow me. Cover me, but stay behind. I want to see who these guys are.”

It took only a few moments to deploy. Mike stood waiting in the shadows as the men continued to work their way toward the dome. More quickly now that they were out of range of the cameras. One of the men would have commented on the lax security had they not been on silent mode.

When they were a few feet away, Mike worked a remote control device, lighting up the area. The men behind him made their presence known. The two men slowly dropped their rifles and raised their hands. It was still hard to see their faces with their coat hoods up.

“Drop the hoods,” Mike said, his P-14 held in a classic Weaver stance. When their faces could be seen, Mike softly said, “Well if it isn’t Number One and Number Two.”

“What?” asked Number one, venom in his tone. Number Two looked wary.

“Harris and Bonestall,” Mike said, the weapon steady, pointed between the two men.

“I told you she would tell him,” Harris hissed at Bonestall.

A touch more loudly now, Mike asked the simple question, “Which one of you killed my sister?”

Harris, Number One, just stared at him with hate filled eyes. Mike was watching Bonestall, Number Two. Mike saw Bonestall’s eyes flick toward Harris a fraction of an instant before Harris spoke.

Mike shifted his stance slightly and squeezed the trigger of the P-14. A neat .45 caliber hole appeared in Harris’ forehead. Harris fell silently. The men behind Mike tensed.

Looking at Bonestall, Mike flatly said shifting his aim, “That means you gave the order.” He squeezed the P-14’s trigger again. Bonestall fell dead beside his partner. “Clean it up,” Mike said to his people. They were looking at him with shock on their faces. This was one hard man.

Mike safed the P-14 and re-holstered it. He turned and walked back to

the main entrance doors, leaving the people behind to take care of business. There was a procedure for handling deaths. He'd seen to it.

He was a little surprised to see a vehicle in the parking area when he got to the doors. It was a black Suburban. A touch tense, he entered the lobby. When he saw Amanda he relaxed. She hurried over to him as fast as she could. "Mike! They're coming after you. Harris and Bonestall. I came out to warn you." Sara was watching silently.

"Not anymore," Mike said. They're both dead."

"Guns," she said softly. Mike nodded. "Maybe they are needed, sometimes." It was a huge admission for her.

Obviously tired, Amanda moved to one of the lobby chairs and sat down. Sara moved out of the way but continued to watch. "We caught the others. They have a place much like this one. Harris and Bonestall got away. Harris was yelling that you were a dead man. I was so frightened for you. You've been such a big help. The evacuations aren't going well and the weather is getting worse. I don't know what to do."

They looked out the door. All they could see was snow.

Mike glanced at Sara, standing there silently, and looked down at Amanda. He had his hand on her shoulder to comfort her. Life was going to be very interesting for him.

Man! It Is Cold Out There! – Epilog

Life went on in the areas that weren't under the newly forming glaciers. Wars were fought for the possession of warm, safe, areas. Mexico, by force of arms, was made a part of the United States. Canada ceased to exist as a nation. For over five hundred years Mike's descendants from both lines, ruled The Facility as a Benevolent Monarchy. In 2525 the

snow melted away completely before it snowed again on the site of the former Jefferson City, Missouri capitol building. Life began to head north again.

End *****

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