

# Planning Armageddon

George McNeur



# Planning Armageddon

by

George McNeur

The characters and events in this story, are entirely fictitious. Even John Key!

Thanks to Doug for the Financial ideas, and to my crazy brothers and sisters for the "penguin religion" discussion that arose!

© George McNeur 2011

"H-Hour approaches. Final chance to call it quits. Are you really sure about this? Last chance to walk away - although with a couple of million BioHaz level 4 devices lurking in public places I'd say it was past that now, but still. We can stop now if you want. Call it."

Tom's mind flashed back trying to remember where it all started. What on earth were they about to do - this was beyond mass murder, even beyond genocide - nothing other than full global extermination, coupled of course with the multiple relatively trivial associated crimes against domestic and international law and in fact against humanity itself? . . .

Chapter 1 Contemplating Catastrophe

Chapter 2 Designing Devastation

Chapter 3 Engineering Extinction

Chapter 4 Triggering the Terror

Chapter 5 Surviving the Cataclysm

Appendix Code words

Authors Footnote

Also by the Author - The Hand of God - preview

## Chapter 1 - Contemplating Catastrophe

**01 January 2011**

"So what New Year resolutions have you made this year Tom?"

Josh handed his work colleague and best friend the question at the same time as the beer. Their "traditional" New Year's day BBQ was now settling into the "post-lunch-wile-away-the-afternoon" phase as Josh settled back in his own deck chair.

Tom twisted off the cap, and raised the lip of the bottle in salute, en-route to his mouth.

"Cheers Josh." He took an appreciative gulp. "No resolutions anymore for me - they're usually just a meaningless fad so I don't bother. I am however determined I will not be a victim this year."

"A victim?" Josh queried.

"Sure - no more being the scapegoat at work for other people's ineptitude. Responsibility will be properly re-directed as required!" Tom replied.

"Ah-ha," laughed Josh. "I can see Lorraine and Mike cringing in fear now!"

"What about victim of the universe?" he added.

"It's only 2011, not 2012 yet." retorted Tom.

Josh laughed again, but then he turned a bit more serious. "What is your take on that?" he asked.

"Load of bollocks." Tom retorted.

"Well yes, but . . ." Josh paused. "Look at this way - if a large percentage of the population believe something is going to happen, don't you think it may become reality as a result?"

"What, like some kind of mass hysteria, or self fulfilling prophecy?"

"Yeah - well remember Y2K and other instances, maybe some cult of weirdo's will believe in doomsday enough to decide they should make doubly sure of it and do something to make sure it happens." Josh postulated.

Tom took another pull at his beer.

"Well, let's consider the possibilities here - what could happen to qualify as an extinction event? Giant asteroid impacts earth, huge dust-cloud blocks the sun causes global ice-age - not much chance someone could cause that." he theorised.

"Giant volcano eruption with the molten lava and again with the dust cloud" Josh added

"May be possible to trigger a volcano with a bomb of some sort you reckon?" Tom smiled.

"Maybe." Josh retorted. "Ditto for seismic/tidal wave - drop a nuke down the San Andreas fault or at several strategic points around the Pacific Ring of Fire".

"Or, engineer a mass deployment of some exotic killer/zombie plague eh? Don't forget the zombies, man!" Tom chuckled as he aped the slow robotic zombie arms. "Damn" he muttered as he slopped some of his beer on his pants in the process.

"That'll learn you" chuckled Josh. "So, if someone did something like that, how likely is that to become a self fulfilling prophecy d'ya reckon?"

"Hmmm" Tom became thoughtful, "Assuming you could trigger a seismic event that created a big enough tidal wave around the Ring of Fire, that might make our life here in NZ, around the Pacific and along the west coast of USA & South America a bit awkward but Europe & Africa would probably survive."

"What about any subsequent effects due to less land/more seawater on the surface of the planet, which might tilt the earth's axis or trigger a global thermal change?" Josh wondered.

"Hmmm, possible . . ." mused Tom slowly.

"I'd say a human spread virus is a high probability for a weirdo cult scenario bent on proving the 2012 prophecy right" Josh added. "Assuming you had the contacts to engineer or steal the appropriate virus, and had enough people to smuggle it to multiple locations to allow a same-day release, it would be a lot easier than triggering a volcano or a tidal wave."

"I'm sure it's not so easy to source the kind of virus you'd need, but I guess if you were determined enough it is feasible. But who'd want to do something like that just to say 'I told you so'!" opined Tom. "You'd have to be pretty loopy to go that far!"

"Maybe not," mused Josh candidly watching an ant making it's way up the leg of Tom's deck chair. "if you thought there was a chance that someone else might do something like that and you couldn't control them, you might decide to do something of your own in the way of a 'pre-emptive strike' as it were, to make sure that you and your family survived under your terms rather than having extinction thrust upon you."

The ant moved onto the underside of Tom's leg, obviously tickling him, as he raised his leg and spotting the ant racing along, casually flicked it off. He then noticed a nearby hole where more ants were emerging from and was just about to pour some of his beer over them when their conversation caught up with what he was about to do.

"Hmmm, maybe you've got something there, but you'd have to be pretty darn sure of what was happening in the world or how committed the weirdo's actually are."

They sat swigging thoughtful mouthfuls of the refreshing beer for a few quiet minutes and then Tom re-directed the thread of the conversation by saying "Speaking of weirdo's doing drastic things, did you see in the iSoS alerts the other day? The idiots in Thailand and Greece joining the 'let's blow all the non-believers up' brigade? As if Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and the rest aren't enough!"

And so the conversation drifted elsewhere, but a seed had been sown . . .

### **30 January 2011**

"Hey guys, how was the week at the batch?" Liz, Josh's wife, asked Tom and Linda as they trooped in. They had just got back that day and had previously arranged another BBQ with Josh & Liz to save the effort of cooking after the drive back home.

"It was great!" Linda exclaimed "For a change this year we had Tom's old school-mate and his family along and they brought their speed boat with them, so Tom was able to provide endless hours of entertainment for us all with his attempts at water skiing!"

Tom aimed a pained look at his wife and shrugged his shoulders at Josh as if to say "women are so perfect" but said nothing and busied himself breaking out the salads and drinks etc.

Later as they settled down on the porch after everything bar the drinks and munchies was put away, Tom said "You know Josh how we were talking about the weirdo's creating their own Armageddon for 2012, well do you remember me talking about Fin, my old school-mate with the boat? We called him Fin 'cos he could swim like a fish, but anyway, after school he joined the Navy, and after that he joined GCSB in Signals Intelligence."

Liz interrupted "GCSB?"

Josh answered for her "Government Communications Security Bureau - our Governments answer to the Yanks' CIA" he said, then stiffening to a seated 'attention' position and putting his hand over his heart he added " 'we will snoop on your conversations for the good of the nations security' - secret squirrel stuff my dear!"

Tom scowled at Josh and continued.

"Right, so anyway, I was telling him about our conversation about weirdo's and the self fulfilling doomsday prophecy idea. Well, you know what? He didn't laugh it off or anything else - he just looked out over the lake and muttered to himself "Be afraid Squirt, be very afraid." then when he looked back at me he totally changed the subject. (Squirt was my nickname at school). You know, he was telling me something without being able to tell me anything, and I have to tell you, what he's implying scares the shit out of me."

"Are you telling me that one of our own countries spooks is confirming our theory that some people might try to end the world?!" demanded Josh.

Tom sighed "You know I thought about that every night since the conversation wondering if I heard him wrong or misunderstood it, and each time I keep coming back to the idea that that's the only explanation. Fin is not a melodramatic guy, nor one to play a prank of that nature. For him to say what he said, he must have had some indication of at least one or more credible threat along the lines of our conversation through his work, which he therefore can't talk about. And that scares me."

"So what you're trying to tell me is that our Government's Signals Intelligence people believe that somewhere in the world, people are plotting to try and create an extinction event in order to fulfil the 2012 prophecy?" Josh queried incredulously.

Tom simply shrugged his shoulders and said matter-of-factly "Sure sounds like it."

### **31 January 2011 (Monday)**

Josh walked into Tom's office and came straight to the point.

"Liz & I talked all night about this 2012 thing. If your mate Fin is right then we need to do what we can to either stop them, or beat them to it. Since it's entirely probable that there is more than one group, we think the best course of action is to beat them to it."

"What?!" exclaimed Tom "You mean make our own plot to destroy the world?"

"Well, if the world, or all the people in it is going to be destroyed, then I want us and our kids to survive it and it would seem that the only way to achieve that is to make our own pre-emptive strike so that we are in control of what happens." responded Josh.

"You're crazy mate!" retorted Tom.

"You talk it over with Linda tonight and let me know what she thinks. But I'm telling you, that Liz wants our kids to have a chance at a life and that's what it boils down to."



## Chapter 2 - Designing Devastation

**05 February 2011 (Saturday)**

"Right" said Josh, "you start - summary of what this 2012 Armageddon thing is all about."

Tom took a breath and rattled off a summary of his findings:

"Well, there's an awful lot of crackpot ideas, & personal hypotheses as well as the more numerous and commonly heard theories. The list includes predictions from Nostradamus, web-bots, Tibetan monks, alien visitation patterns, numerology, the cycle of planet X/Nibiru which either hits us or draws a huge asteroid into us, galactic alignment, the Oort cloud of comets which is associated with a 25,800 year cycle, Timewave Zero or 'the novelty theory' [as in new ideas], the rate of current climate change, and also apparently NASA has confirmed that solar storms will peak in 2012."

Drawing a breath he continued "Of course the book of Revelations in the Bible is also cited and while it doesn't specifically mention 2012, many people link the antichrist's period of reign to end in 2012 as apparently Obama is the antichrist! However, the strongest link to 2012 always seems to come back firstly to the Mayan long count calendar and variously also to the Cherokee calendar and also the Chinese I-Ching which all apparently indicate an 'end' on 21 (or 23) December 2012."

"Some of these predictions are interpreted or stated to result in an 'end' - as in a cataclysmic event that no-one survives, while others interpret them to be a point of change - some for good and some for bad. Some of the theories talk about a specific date trigger point for the change while others say that the conditions e.g. in the case of planetary or galactic alignment, will be maximised on that date but the change could be spread around that date as the conditions exist but are strengthening and then waning as in the alignment of planets etc. It's worth noting that while many theorists site the galactic alignment as the trigger, others point out that the alignment would have been strongest in 1998 and are only really referencing it in relation to the Mayan calendar."

He added "I have the feeling that if we were to exclude the ideas from the people whose ideas seem more in the category of 'crackpot/weirdo's' with little in the way of actual evidence, then the majority of the rest while stating that there will be an event around that time, are of the mind that it is simply a time for a point of change, and the majority are actually saying a change for the better as in a 'level up' opportunity for humans."

Linda chimed in "Yeah, but it only takes one committed bunch of crackpots to stuff it all up for everyone else!"

"Like us you mean?" jibed Tom sardonically.

There was silence for a bit as they all contemplated what they were thinking of doing. Then Tom seeing the determined looks on their two wives faces, draw a breath and said "Ok Josh, well, what did you find about what constitutes an extinction event and what people think lies in store for us in 2012."

Josh outlined his research:

"Earth's fossil records show evidence of 5 major extinction events where significant percentages of the species on the planet died out completely. These have taken place, in sequence: 65, 200, 251, 364, & 439 million years ago, There have also been many other less major events where lower percentages of species vanished. Some of these are argued to fit a cyclic pattern of 26,000 years. The last minor extinction event occurred around 11,000 years ago and wiped out 'only' about 40 species including sabre-tooth cats and woolly mammoths. The reasons for these events have not been conclusively proven, but are most commonly accepted to have consisted of a "press-pulse" situation where a long-term pressure had been building up and

when a short-term event (pulse) occurred as a trigger, the other conditions then exacerbated and prolonged the situation. An example is where say an asteroid strike could have created a localised effect and a wider reaching dust cloud that due to a decline in atmospheric conditions for example was able to create a long term climate change causing the mass extinctions. Most accepted possible pulse events include super volcanoes, and asteroid strike/meteor shower. Less widely accepted theories include a black hole twin to our sun (called Nemesis) and planetary alignments coinciding with a galactic alignment triggering massive solar flares and/or other effects such as attracting asteroids and black holes. As Tom said though, the galactic alignment apparently already occurred in 1998."

"Oh, and it is also worth noting that many people believe that a 6<sup>th</sup> extinction event is currently in the process of happening right now, as we humans have contributed to a global climate change through excessive CO2 emissions, deforestation, and over-hunting."

Tom interrupted, "Right, so out of the multitude of possible contributing factors to an extinction event, what do you consider to be the most likely for a man-triggered event?"

Josh laid out the possibilities:

"Assuming we are only concerning ourselves with a trigger that occurs at one time rather than over a prolonged period, and ignoring the likes of natural occurring events which humans could not influence, the remaining possibilities really only include a pandemic plague/virus, a nuclear/chemical/biological war, a so-called 'grey-goo' scenario of nano-machines consuming resources to replicate themselves, an 'Arnie' Terminator Skynet scenario, or stretching it a bit - a volcano/earthquake/tidal wave which potentially could be triggered by suitable explosives, however controlling a volcano etc when the geologists don't know how is likely to be problematic."

He continued "So from a real practical and practically controllable point of view, the only real option for us would be the chemical/biological/killer virus one. We should be able to identify a number of possible candidate viri quite easily with a bit of research, and deploying it should be relatively easy - well easier than creating Skynet! The biggest problem I see will be in obtaining the appropriate chemical or biological material."

"Agreed." said Tom. "How about we all research possible candidate chemicals or viri and settle on a short-list that means we have more chances of getting hold of one that will work for us."

"Sure. Criteria for the short-list would have to include rapid spread rate, 100% kill rate and fast acting so there's no time to develop antidotes, and also fairly common/well known to increase our chances of finding it available." said Jim

"Also, ideally inert until specifically activated so we can handle it in relative safety, and also ideally either that it breaks down in sea water, or it is only activated for a short duration so we can be sure to contain the spread." added Tom

"Add to that list no known antidote." added Liz "if we're going to take out a whole country, we want the whole area taken out with no chance of the privileged few i.e. government/military surviving from a secret antidote stash."

"What about guaranteeing our survival?" asked Linda. "How are we going to make sure no-one who has contracted the virus brings it back say on an international flight like what happened with swine flu?"

"Well, unless the virus choice allows us to have an antidote and/or really cast iron protection, then either we'll have to make sure with an 'instant' virus or we may have to look at getting help from someone who can close our borders one way or another." suggested Tom.

"So that means we're heading towards targeting every country except NZ and the whole of NZ becomes a safe haven does it?" queried Josh.

"I hadn't really thought about that" Tom mused "but I guess it makes sense. That would also mean we have a larger pool of people to repopulate with afterwards. If we wipe out everyone except us then our kids will have to marry each other and it won't take long for us to all die anyway down the track."

"Maybe as well as researching viri, we should also research survival and what we're going to need for the long term." suggested Liz "How about us girls look into that while you boys look into the virus question?"

"Sounds like a plan" agreed Josh.

"We need to be careful when doing this research though. Fin has previously told us about some of the key word combinations they watch for and we need to keep this in mind to keep from attracting undue attention." Tom cautioned.

"Maybe we need to have a project code name and a series of coded references up our sleeves so we can refer to key elements in plain conversation without triggering any alarms." Josh proposed. "How about I start a list and everyone can add to it as the plans progress?"

"Good idea" Linda agreed.

"What about finances?" Liz added "I presume at some point we're going to have to have trips to most parts of the world let alone obtaining the virus. That's going to cost - how are we going to pay for that?"

"Sounds like your project Liz" said Josh "That was your area of expertise before you traded it in for motherhood!"

"Well, finding thousands of dollars of free money wasn't exactly what I did, but I guess that now you mention it I do have some ideas to check out. It's a little bit easier since we know that people won't be around afterwards so if we can spend on credit as much as possible it will reduce the amount of up-front funds we'll need."

Tom chimed in "Plus I suppose you don't have to worry so much about the legal nature of the schemes we use?"

"Hmmm, I suppose not - that gives me quite a few more ideas!" Liz said "Let me think about it a bit more."

"Ok, well it sounds like we have the makings of a plan of attack. Summarised Tom "Josh & I will research possible chemical and biological agents to use, Liz will look into financing the scheme and Linda, you're looking into the survivalist requirements."

"Check" they all agreed.

## **12 February 2011 (Saturday)**

"This must be a project meeting" quipped Josh as he and Liz trooped into Tom & Linda's house "I see everyone has got at least a couple of pieces of paper with them!"

"Who's on minutes?" Tom threw right back at him as Linda handed each of them a drink.

"No minutes" said Josh firmly "these meetings never happened and there is no such thing as project Scythe"

"Scythe?" queried Linda

"Sure" suggested Josh "The earliest recorded biological warfare act is in 400BC when the Scythians under King Atteas dipped their arrowheads in decomposing bodies or blood infected with shit. I'm suggesting 'Scythe' as our word because it could be more readily used in modern conversation, compared to 'Atteas' and a scythe cuts large swathes in one stroke."

He pushed forward a couple of sheets of paper to Tom , Linda and Liz.

"Here's my list of possible words so far. I propose we use 'Scythe' as our code for the overall project for starters and hold off on any others until we've all got our heads around all the angles and can think of better ones."

Everyone was nodding at his suggestion as they glanced over the list.

"Sounds reasonable." suggested Tom . "So to kick off today, Liz, why don't you tell us about financing?"

"Sure" said Liz "Well the suggestion that the methods didn't have to be legal and the fact that we don't have to worry about settling things later opens up quite a lot of opportunity that would have otherwise meant we would probably not be able to fundraise thousands of dollars."

"I toyed with the idea of starting a new religion - there's plenty of bogus so-called 'religions' earning their creators pots of money, but I figure that we're going to be busy enough doing everything else without having the hassles of organising and running a religion as well, so despite the great ideas Josh and I had about a penguin cult that was maximised for revenue generation, I put that one aside."

"Penguin cult?!!!" exclaimed Linda

"Oh yes," replied Liz "it was going to be great. Very stylish creatures penguins. Very majestic and a perfect medium for channelling spiritual messages gleaned from the Aurora Australis."

"But anyway, back to things that will work a bit more easily for us - most of the schemes are internet based which gives us a global reach and anonymity. A couple of the ideas I have include selling a product that normally sells for say \$80-\$100 for say \$50 but the trick is we don't ship any product! Selling shares as a way of fundraising to raise a newly discovered sunken treasure galleon, and a charity site gathering donations for whatever - earthquake relief, the flood in Brisbane etc. I'll need to time most of these so the eventually disgruntled customer complaints don't cause problems, but the likes of the charity donations could go into action now and I can also do the get-rich-quick scheme which gets people to pay say \$100 for a sure-fire, legal way to make money easily - and send anyone who sends in the money a note to say 'do the same as I just did'. Purely legal and it will catch some to give us some of our start-up war-chest."

"I won't bore you with all the details of all the schemes, but suffice to say there are a couple of quite varied scams and schemes I can run that should bring in sufficient funds."

"And what constitutes 'sufficient' Liz?" queried Linda.

"I've made an attempt at a project budget" said Liz as she slipped some copies of a sheet of paper out to each of them. "You'll see I've considered

we'll need to fund travel, protective equipment, a workshop, survival supplies, . . ."

Tom interrupted "Why's 'IT' so much? I figure you mean a router and PC for the workshop which wouldn't be that much would it?"

"I figured we'll need several untraceable IP addresses and email accounts to hide behind." Liz said. "I don't know anything about that stuff and simply bung in an amount that had allowance to hire someone to help with that kinda stuff. Also we'll need a stock of 'disposable' untraceable cellphones."

"Ok" mused Josh "but what's this one 'Heavy'? It is a significant chunk of funds!"

"Another one I'm not sure about but I figured since none of us have any expertise in biological science that somewhere along the way we might need to hire some 'heavies' to steal us some viruses." Liz answered matter-of-factly.

"Whoa girl!" exclaimed Tom "Don't you think that's a bit 'cloak and dagger' for a couple of simple folk like us?"

"Well what did you think killing the majority of humans on this planet was going to be Tom? I don't believe you thought we were going to have a Sunday picnic and everyone just shuffled off around us, but surely you envisaged at least something like that?" retorted Liz.

There was a moment of silence and then Tom sighed and admitted "Well, I guess so, but I've been in denial I suppose."

Josh chimed in to keep the ball rolling "So Linda, what about surviving?"

Linda dished out copies of a list of her own. "Well, if we were going to try and do it solo and wipe out everyone except ourselves then we'd have some serious challenges. Think of a list for going camping and then multiply it by forever and broaden the equipment to cover every aspect of life. This is a list that was provided for the home survivalist back in the 50's when everyone was concerned about a nuclear war. Top of the list is the survival shelter sealed and filtered against biological warfare contaminants, protective suits etc, then you go onto your more basic items such as food, water, medical supplies, guns & ammunition for protection and hunting, equipment to determine safe/unsafe areas, batteries, generators, fuel, and you can see it goes on and on. And then that doesn't take into account what happens afterwards. If there is truly no-one else around then you have to do everything for yourself including fixing the house and car, arranging heating, getting food once all the perishables are gone, etc etc. And what about leisure activities - who makes new movies or books etc? And longer term, if there's no-one else, then who do the kids marry - themselves?? Tricky, and not much of a life really."

"But since it seems that we're going down the path of having the whole of New Zealand as an oasis of life in the rest of the dead world, then the situation is dramatically different and an awful lot easier. We might not need to make any special survival arrangements except perhaps as a precaution to lay in a few days food stores and whatever anti-biological agents seem appropriate, as well as perhaps some defensive firepower in case anyone is seriously pissed off at what we've done. That list is on the back of that other one."

"Seems a valid line of reasoning." agreed Josh "The long term import needs will just mean we ship teams of people overseas to run the operations and/or pick up the stuff that will be just sitting around. That's not anything we could, or need to organise before hand as there should be sufficient reserves, and in fact the country as a whole will need to adapt from the current import and export driven focus that different people and companies are currently pursuing, so that will all just be a part of the redistribution of focus and effort that will follow in the wake of the event."

"Alright then boys, what about the bugs?" asked Liz

"Well, that's a little trickier than you might think." said Tom "We need to consider something that spreads like billy-oh within a country so that you can release it one spot and have it cover the continent but that spreading takes time and leaves opportunity for the people at the end of the chain to prepare countermeasures and antidotes."

"Yeah." added Josh "We also need to consider the deployment method. I mean the military have had the likes of anthrax, mustard gas and more recently sarin and other chemical and biological agents weaponised for years but for instance, you might remember back in 1988 in northern Iraq, Sarin and other chemical agents were used to try and wipe out the population of ethnic Kurds in Halabja. Despite a 2 day bombardment there was 'only' an estimated 5,000 out of 70,000 people killed - which is only 7% - not high enough for our purposes. While it's going to be hard for us to do any artillery style bombarding, an airborne release in a major subway system of a densely populated city would have the best result, but in less populated areas we need to consider other deployment methods."

"It's considered that the ability to deploy a biological agent over a wide area, would be limited to those countries having cruise missiles or advanced aircraft, and that a terrorist group really only has the capability to deliver small quantities to a specific target. It seems likely that global deployment will prove to be our biggest problem to solve." continued Josh.

"Oh by the way" added Tom "Let's not forget that all the weaponised agents for warfare are considered WMD's and are outlawed."

"Yep." agreed Josh. "Anything useful for us is totally and seriously illegal. As soon as we start doing anything physical with this we become international criminals and by definition terrorists, so just keep that in mind."

"In terms of biological agents, what we need by definition is biohazard level 4 category. There's only 4 levels with 4 as the most serious. The definition of a level 4 biohazard are viruses and bacteria that cause severe to fatal disease in humans, and for which vaccines or other treatments are not available. Examples for this include Bolivian and Argentine hemorrhagic fevers. The next level down, Biohazard level 3, is for viruses and bacteria that cause severe to fatal disease but for which there ARE vaccines. This includes the likes of SARs, anthrax, TB, malaria, typhus and the like."

Tom continued "So we looked into Bio-haz 4 items. Bolivian hemorrhagic fever, or BHF, has a 5 to 30 percent mortality rate but has a slow onset. It's normally spread by a particular type of Bolivian mouse. Argentine hemorrhagic fever or AHF, is similarly spread by a mouse and has an untreated mortality rate of 15-30% and also a slow onset. Ebola is a more commonly known hemorrhagic fever with a slightly higher mortality rate around 34% but also a slow onset of around 3 weeks. Ebola was considered ahead of the eventually used Sarin for the Tokyo subway attack, however even better is anthrax as approximately 10 grams of anthrax spores can kill as many persons as a ton of sarin."

"Under ideal conditions, a single aircraft can disperse 100 kg of anthrax 'crop dusting' style over a 300 km<sup>2</sup> area and theoretically cause 3 million deaths in a population density of 10,000 people per km<sup>2</sup>." Tom added.

"Delivery by explosives however, reduces the effectiveness to about 5%, whereas practical spraying efficiency can be more likely around 50% effective when you take into weather and the like. There is protection against anthrax however, and so we need to look into all this a lot more though to consider all the options."

"Obviously, due to the nature of things, there's a lot of information still to find out in this area and some of it might have to wait until we are secure behind an anonymous IP address." Josh continued. "I think we're going

to need a lot more info and several choices for the bugs as one virus alone may not achieve the desired result of a majority percentage takedown."

"We also need to consider that several nations will have people stationed routinely in nuclear and bio-safe control centres such as USA's NORAD or Presidential bunker." Tom added. "We probably won't be able to get to them but are we concerned about that kind of person anyway? Remembering the whole idea of our pre-emptive strike was to prevent the weirdo's fulfilling the prophecy, it's highly probable that anyone with access to such a bunker is likely to be an official and as such unlikely to do something like that."

"Hmmmmm" mused Liz out loud "that's likely to be true, the down-side though is that those people are the ones who have access to all the nukes and other 'official' WMD's and could cause trouble in the post event days, so it would be good to be able to get them too if we can."

"Agreed" said Josh, "but I don't think it's the end of the world if we miss them right?"

"Ha - 'end of the world'" Tom grinned sardonically, "you're a funny man Josh!"

"Poor choice of words, perhaps" grinned Josh "but you know what I mean."

"So even though you need to do more research on this one" Linda asked "have you got any ideas about practical things like sourcing, making, and delivery yet?"

"Some ideas." replied Josh "Well, sourcing, making and replicating depend on the particular beastie we choose. On the delivery side though, we know that usually Bio-haz 4 viruses will be tricky to deliver as they often need to be in controlled environments up until the delivery whereas chemical agents such as sarin etc are typically in what they call a binary form - essentially like a two-part mix. Safe as houses until you mix the two together. These are likely to be binary liquids which will be tricky to send and therefore might need to be hand delivered. Some of them though can be freeze dried and therefore sent around fairly easily like a packet of beef jerky."

Tom continued "Yeah, so to summarise what we've got so far, we should consider chemical agents which have the advantage of ease of delivery in terms of their typical binary form, but the downside of difficult to deploy as each person has to be directly exposed to the agent. Also most chemical agents have known antidotes, but they typically have a faster take-down rate than a bio-haz agent."

"Yes" continued Josh, "whereas the bio-haz agents have the advantage that they are spread by infected people which would make deployment easier, but delivery may be more difficult."

"Okay" said Linda "so you still need to dig into the bugs a lot more. That's ok, we always knew it wouldn't be an overnight walk in the park. Is there anything else though that we can nail down? What about a timeline?"

"Yes" agreed Liz "I need to know when to kick off the various fundraising schemes in relation to D-day in order to avoid the consequences of any illegal or payment-due ones that run too long."

"I don't think we can finalise a 'D-day' until we've finalised the bugs." opined Tom "but I think we need to be targeting the event to take place in, or before, November 2012. That's working on the principal that most of the crazies will be looking to fulfil the prophecy on Dec 21 and we want to get in first."

"Right" agreed Josh "I reckon we'll need a couple of months to set up a base with untraceable IP addresses, then a couple more months to finalise the bugs

and methods to use, then maybe 6 months to get everything in place which probably means that this time next year we could be ready if everything went really smoothly. Allowing for the fact that we are bio-engineering 'noobs' that probably actually means we won't be ready until mid 2012."

"And we go as soon as everything's ready?" mused Linda. "We don't need to wait until November do we."

"No" agreed Tom "waiting after we're ready simply allows time for someone to find us out and poke a stick in the wheel of our plans. Also you never know if someone else isn't going to wait until December either. If we're going to do this at all, I agree we go as soon as we're ready."

"Ditto" said Josh as Liz also nodded her agreement.

Liz was jotting down the rough timeline that Josh had outlined. "So that means that in parallel with your bug investigations, the priority at the moment should be to get behind an untraceable IP address with enough funds to cover that? Possibly also to set up a secure base to do that from while I see about some untraceable bank accounts?"

"Seems like it" they all agreed.

"It also looks like I'm the logical one to co-ordinate everything" volunteered Linda. "Liz has a full-time job with the financials and you boys have a full-time job with the virus and IT. I assume that one of you will find out about the untraceable IP address, 'cos I sure wouldn't know where to start with that?"

"I've got a few ideas about that." Tom agreed thoughtfully. "Sure, leave that one with me."

"So Liz, if you go ahead and set up these accounts, is this the point where we cross into illegal territory?" Josh asked "I ask because I was thinking that we might be able to go almost all the way through preparing for this without committing ourselves to doing anything illegal, but potentially, the IP address thing and the accounts fall into that category."

"Setting up the network of accounts isn't illegal in it's own right unless I open any in a false name. I think I can get around that though. However, sourcing the money through some of the schemes I plan will cross the line, but they also need to wait until we are sure of the timeline. I can do some low level legal fundraising in the meantime. I can't say about the IP address though."

"I think just talking about this could constitute a conspiracy." opinioned Josh. "I was hoping we'd have a series of 'Go/No-Go' points which we could go right up to without being illegal but I think we all need to commit one way or another right now. How about we think about it this week and either launch or disband project Scythe next Saturday? We'll still have another Go/No-Go point before we actually start doing anything with WMD material, but I think it's worthwhile considering now if we're all happy to be international criminals one more time."

"It sure is a biggie" agreed Tom. "Okay, in or out next week."

The girls nodded.



## Chapter 3 - Engineering Extinction

### **18 March 2011 (Friday)**

"Hey it's the Managing Director himself come to slum it with the plebs!" Tom called in greeting as Josh wended his way through the crowd to his table. "How goes the war?"

Josh sat down and took a good pull at his beer "Good, it goes well. Looks like I've got some catching up to do!" he added as he pointed to the empty glass on the table.

"Nah, I just got here - that's a left over from someone else. So how's the new job?" he asked with a coded grin and wink.

"Ah good, except the boss is an idiot" Josh answered.

"Well you've only got yourself to blame for that, funny man!" retorted Tom with a laugh.

They both laughed.

At their last "meeting" Josh had suggested that in order to minimise the chances of official problems from their research, and to increase their chances of success with the various aspects of making the plan happen, that it would be exceedingly helpful for them to have their own Biohazard related company. Consequently he had recently quit his job and started up a company they called BioHaz Services Ltd with the stated purpose of providing a biohazard materials transportation and biohazard waste disposal service for the various medical and biotechnology research operations that was a feature of Christchurch and nearby Dunedin. With BioHaz Services as a legitimate cover, they could quite safely conduct a lot of what they needed to do 'in public', and the added bonus was that Josh got to write several of his normal living expenses off to company tax!

So far Josh was a company of one, as he navigated the tortuous course of the various MAF and medical approvals required to operate a biosecurity business with the appropriate approved transitional and permanent storage facilities, and manuals of operating procedures. This was the end of his first week physically working on the new business after finishing up working out his notice period the previous week.

He had arranged to meet Tom for a beer at their normal pub for a debrief on the first week.

"I've decided I don't like Government bureaucracy" announced Josh after another swig. "Man, you should see all the forms I've been filling out with the MAF biosecurities guy. I mean, I thought I'd filled out all the forms in advance the last few weeks and that was a lot, but sitting down with this guy, there's a form for everything!" he complained.

"They're making sure you take it seriously my friend" said Tom "maybe to make sure you're not going to misuse it for anything illegal!" he cracked.

That got a real laugh out of them both.

"Yeah, right!" Josh agreed raising his glass in salute.

"Well, aside from 'death by paperwork', I'd have to say I'm pretty happy with how things are going actually." admitted Josh. "The company is properly registered, I've got a bank account, the approvals are all actually in hand, and I've started contacting the potential customers." He reported. "Tomorrow I'm going to test drive a wagon and should trade my current old dungger in for it. Then I'll get it painted in company colours and be ready to roll."

"What kind of wheels are you looking at?" Tom asked curiously.

"Looking at minivans, utes and possibly station wagons - something big enough to take a couple of biohaz first responder suits and decontamination stuff as

well as a couple or four rubbish bags. The biowaste doesn't take a large volume."

He went on to describe it "I've seen some builders and the like have utes where the mid cab is replaced with tool storage area but the roof slopes up from the cab so it is kind of like a specialised station wagon. I want to be able to do speedy, long distance, deliveries - like live tissue organ donor runs, and look sleek and business like. I'd prefer to have to build a custom mini trailer fitted out as tool board and equipment stowage unit than have to get a large clunky van that can fit everything in it. I'm going to fit those low profile flashing LED lights on the roof - it'll look totally awesome!"

"So you reckon you could be in legitimate business as early as next week?!" asked Tom incredulously.

"Well, it wouldn't be totally painted and fitted out that quick, but I guess I could be." replied Josh, "and that's a good thing because I still need to eat, so earning an income is still important!"

He added "Can I get you to ask Mack if I can borrow the TIG welder next week? I need to weld up some aluminium plate and tube into a custom frame for the equipment stowage once I know what the interior shape is, and I'm also going to make a custom frame to fit onto the passenger seat to allow me to lock a chilly bin style live tissue transport container or two, so it's right beside me but totally secure."

"Sure thing" replied Tom "Do you think he'll give you any hassle since you're no longer an employee?"

"I spoke to him before I left because I knew I'd have some projects like this coming up. He said 'no problem' since he knows I'm checked out on all the gear and he kind of owes me over that fiasco he had with Dave last March. He even said I could come in and use the shop lathe and other gear if I needed it. Since I've got 3 phase power in the new warehouse I don't need to go into the shop to use the TIG welder. But if he needs to use it himself over the week then I can do it there if he prefers."

He paused, then continued "Actually on second thoughts, it might be easier doing it there because then I can use the saw, clamps, jigs and grinders etc as well and maybe score the odd bit of plate aluminium from work stocks rather than having to buy quite so much myself!"

"Sounds all too convenient!" Tom decided "So I'll tell him first thing Monday to expect you shall I?"

"That'd be great thanks mate" responded Josh

"You know" Tom mused pensively "I reckon you should go around the dealers tomorrow rather than the second hand yards to start with because they are more likely to be able to provide you the customised version you're after quicker than a second hand. And if you're writing it off with tax anyway it might be better for that too."

"It's a thought isn't it?" said Josh. "I might just see what the accountant says about that and do it"

"How is Liz?" asked Tom finishing his beer. "Get you another?"

## **29 March 2011 (Tuesday)**

"Yes! This is the life!" thought Josh to himself as pushed the speedo up to just under 110 km/hr as he left the outskirts of Christchurch behind him.

He was feeling pleased with himself - as well he should! It was only 2 weeks after his last day at his old life and here he was driving his new, customised Citroen C8 decked out in his own company livery, lights flashing making his first live tissue delivery. He was taking a kidney from Christchurch to Dunedin hospital. The distance not so far to make a difference between using an airplane or helicopter and land transportation

compared to the cost of the two and how long the kidney could remain on ice and still "take" when transplanted.

He was pleased with how the fit-out and painting had gone, thinking how lucky it was that Mack knew someone at a paint-shop with an opening to do the paintjob more or less straight away. Josh had therefore made a rapid job of the interior custom aluminium storage frame so that it could be painted the same colour at the same time as the exterior. It was bit more than just "a frame" though - he had created a whole modular storage system that would hold the first responder suit and breathing apparatus on his side, and the bulk of the tools and equipment on the other side, accessible in shadow-board style shelves that could slide out of the wagon door for easier access. Once you were in the first responder suit, your movements were restricted and you didn't want to be snagging the suit on the car and tearing a hole in it! This was why the sliding rear doors had been such an important feature for his choice.

He'd ummed and ahed about the Mazda BT50 and Mazda MPV, or a Nissan Navara with canopy set but what he had really wanted was the dual rear sliding doors which made it easier to get gear in and out. This was normally a feature of people movers or cargo vans, but he hadn't wanted the higher van styles they typically featured. He'd finally chosen from between the Kia Carnival and the C8. He'd preferred the C8 as it was a little lower than the Carnival and also taking the seats out of the back was a design feature rather than an unbolting exercise.

With the seats out he'd then laid down a rubber mat under some aluminium floor sheets with his custom built equipment frames attached. With the low profile flashing amber and red LED strobe light kit on the roof front and rear, and the whole ensemble painted in his BHS, almost-dayglo, orange and the full-size biohaz logo's on the bonnet and front doors, it certainly was an eye-catcher!

He'd also scored a pair of personalised plates - BIOHAZ and B10HAZ and reckoned the effect was just the bees knees. The BIOHAZ plates were fitted to the C8 and he was going to fit the B10HAZ plates to the custom gear trailer initially, but if work picked up enough to hire another person and outfit another car or wagon, then it could go on that one. He still had the option of getting B10HAZ and B10HAZ plates as well. He didn't think anyone would be rushing to get them just yet.

The sign-writing was minimal and the whole job had been completed faster than he'd thought possible. And now he was putting it through it's paces on it's maiden, paying, journey.

He pulsed the siren on for a couple of seconds and manoeuvred around a car that was a little slow to get out of his way. He wasn't 100% sure he was legally entitled to act like an ambulance and require the public to get out of his way, but he was used to acting first and asking questions later! "Someone will tell me I'm not allowed to do that" he thought to himself. It was pretty cool being 'master of the road' - and made for a much faster trip!

## **07 April (Thursday)**

Josh swiped his hand along his eyebrow line trying to wipe off the rivulet of sweat that was just starting to prickle at his eye.

He had made the delivery two days ago to the secure biological weapons research facility at Plum Island, New York. Now he was pounding the back trails of the FBI Academy training circuit at Quantico, incredibly pleased with how things were turning out.

After he delivered the kidney to the organ transplant team in the Dunedin hospital, he had used the opportunity as leverage to introduce himself to all the key people there in the biological research field as well as the administrators of the medical waste disposal process. One of the senior

doctors had introduced him to a colleague who was conducting research at a start-up company that was a spin-off from the hospital system, commercialising some of their findings and taking it to the next level as the profits came in.

The particular field he was involved in required the occasional swap of vaccines and various biological samples between co-operating research organisations. The majority of these were based overseas, principally in America and since they were a start-up, they hadn't yet developed the people, and processes to do the transfer. Josh had come along just at the right time, and after he had let them make a few phone calls and website reference checks to prove his credentials and capabilities for making the international transfer, they had wanted him to make the delivery for them. However, being a start-up with limited funds, they were concerned about the cost. Josh had made them an offer saying he would do it for the cost of the travel only, and if he was able to secure additional deliveries on the return trip he would pro-rata reduce that as well. They were a little suspicious at first, but Josh explained that he himself was a start-up and he needed to build up the network of contacts and reputation that such a trip would allow. Also, there was a course for Bio-Haz First Responders that was only conducted in America that he wanted to attend but as a start-up himself, the cost of the trip to get there was making it difficult to justify for his own funds use. If, however, he had a delivery job that paid for the travel, then it was a viable option.

They saw it was a win-win situation all around and sealed the deal on the spot.

The following Monday he had returned to pick-up the samples, flying this time from Dunedin to Auckland and then connecting to America that evening. He'd made the delivery the next day, and after a partial tour (for security reasons he wasn't allowed to see all of the research areas), and made a point of introducing himself and collecting contact details from as many of the key people that he could. As a 'Kiwi' with a full knowledge of every aspect of his business, he was able to stretch this further than would normally have happened if he'd been an American Bio-Haz courier, and Josh made sure to push the boundaries of their hospitality every which way to build his network of contacts. By talking to the team there, he also picked up a handful of contacts at associated research facilities that he was going to follow up with just as soon as he had some time with email access. For the business, and for "Scythe", he needed to build as large a network of people in the scene as possible.

After leaving the research facility, he had flown down to Quantico and presented himself for the training course.

He had applied for the course as soon as he'd got back from Dunedin and was surprised at how easy it seemed to be to do so, however he knew that behind the scenes, the people running the course would have checked him out thoroughly. This was why he had gone through the security screening process as soon as they'd decided to set up the company. The SIS process run on him and his wife, family and friends, was the same process used to clear the NZ military people selected for "Secret" and higher level security clearances. The NZ Government and the international community wanted to know that they were not giving a license to carry potential biological weapons around the world to someone that couldn't be trusted.

"Little did they know" he thought!

Once the clearance process itself was complete, Josh had applied to become a BioHaz First Responder in the event of any terrorist attack, or research accident. He had enquired with the local Christchurch Council, the Police, the airport, MAF, quarantine folk and had been bumped all the way up to some people who only identified themselves as "Government". They had recommended the USA course (presumably after checking his credentials), so his

application, when he submitted it, was passed through and endorsed by these people.

So now that process had done it's job well and he had been cleared into the low security areas of the Quantico FBI facility. The course was being held there since about half the attendee's were FBI sponsored, and also, they had several key facilities all in one place that would make the training logistics a lot easier.

He had reported to the Quantico main gate and been shown where to park and where his room, the mess hall and the training room was. There was a handbook in the room introducing him to the rules and where he could, and couldn't, go during the course duration. The training track was one area he was allowed to go, but almost everywhere else required escorted access. At least each person had their own room - Josh had been expecting a dormitory, but the room was a bonus and complete with shower, toilet and more importantly Josh thought, a network lead with internet access. He would be able to send his emails and use Skype to talk back home.

They had started the course proper yesterday (Wednesday), a rehash of the rules (for those who hadn't read it), a pile of security related paperwork, and then straight into international regulations for biological materials storage, handling and transfer. That had continued today but the last session for the day had been a demonstration in the lab of what can happen when procedure isn't followed, and the mess that was left of the poor rat they had demonstrated on, combined with the drone of the endless regulations had driven Josh out to the track rather than to dinner. He wasn't a particularly squeamish guy, but some things are better left unseen he thought!

Still, overall he thought everything was going very well, and the course was not only going to give him a lot of useful knowledge and increase his credibility and scope for new types of business, it was also giving him a bunch of very useful contacts in the biological materials community and also in government, law enforcement and even military. He thought some of the people on the course could prove to be very helpful to him - in more ways than one.

## **14 April (Wednesday)**

Liz adjusted her headset boom as she finished signing in to Skype. It would be Tuesday night for Josh at Quantico and she hoped the course was still working out well for him.

"Hi hon!" his familiar voice sounded in her headphones as he connected through. "How's my darling?"

They chatted back and forth about normal things and then just when she thought he was going to sign off, Josh added:

"Oh yeah, can you dust off the Scythe and get it sharpened up for me? I think I'll need to cut that long grass by the shed when I get back."

Liz's heart raced a bit faster at the mention of the code word.

"Sure thing" she said wondering if the mention of "long grass" should mean something she'd forgotten.

"Oh well, 'spose I better go" he said "I'll get back in on Sunday morning. If the weather's good, you should get Linda and Tom around - it might be the last chance for BBQ before the weather starts getting wintry."

"Ok" she agreed "I think the weather should be good for that as long as you're not too jet lagged?"

"Nah." he laughed, "but they have been throwing some serious shit at us these last few days so tell Tom I'll need some intense thirst aid therapy or else it might just be the end of my world!"

Liz gulped and tried to keep her voice normal in case anyone was monitoring. She injected a little laugh and queried "Draught, lager or dark?"

"Whiskey" he said emphatically "18 year, single malt - nothing but the best." and then he laughed and added "oh well my dear, I suppose I should get back to my homework and bed. Have a good day. Love you lots, love to the boys."

"Love you too" she said and disconnected.

As she took the headset off, her heart was racing. What had he found? she wondered. From what she remembered of the code they had worked out, he had possibly worked out a candidate for the virus they needed to do the Armageddon job. That "heavy shit" and the reference to "18yr single malt whiskey" made her think that Josh had identified the perfect virus that was potent enough to bring about the end of the world.

She reviewed her plans for the day and figured she could make sure to "bump into" Linda after picking the boys up from school and invite them around for the Barby and to pass on Josh's news.

### **17 April (Sunday)**

The sun was shining, and the birds were singing as Josh sipped his beer relaxing in the deck chair after the long flight back from America.

"So come on big boy," prodded Tom anxiously "spill the beans!"

Josh glanced around thinking it over then deciding it was unlikely they would be under surveillance that would pick up their conversation out here on the deck under the trees, he swallowed another mouthful and then started.

"The course was great" he said "some nasty shit that you don't want to think about let alone see, but in the last few days they told us about all the potential nasties that we might encounter as BioHaz First Responders. They told us shelf life, delivery methods, symptoms, prognosis, countermeasures, isolation and decontamination procedures for each one. It was 'terrorist gold' I tell you!"

He paused and took another drink. No-one was interrupting him so he continued

"That day I rang you Liz, what was that? Tuesday?" he rubbed his hand over his eyes - it really was a long and tiring way from the east coast of America back to LAX, Auckland and then Christchurch . . .

"Anyway, that day they told us about a new little beastie that they were all very excited and worried about. This thing is a mutated cross between Ebola and Anthrax. That means it is a real bastard of a spreader and has the highest casualty rate they have ever seen, despite the normal deployment inefficiency you get from real world conditions."

"Anthrax by itself has always been a popular virus for biological weapons and it was used in WWI and WWII, because of its infectiousness, its stability in the spore form, the respiratory route of aerosol infection, and the high mortality rates. Also, it's origins are in animals so it makes it easy to experiment with and ah cultivate . . . "

"Que?" queried Tom

"I'll come back to that later" answered Josh to all of their quizzical expressions.

"Anthrax is pretty potent too - approx 10 grams of anthrax spores can kill as many people as a whole ton of Sarin, but anthrax is well known and has an antidote." continued Josh, "so by itself, it doesn't address what we want. Ebola, and the other hemorrhagic fevers such as Bolivian and Argentine Hemorrhagic Fevers (BHF and AHF) on the other hand are a different story.

They have high mortality rates too and while there is a form of antidote for them, they're not 100% effective. The downside of these though is they take weeks to incubate which would give people a chance to take countermeasures against an attack of it."

"Anyhooo," he continued "this is where it gets interesting. The Yanks have "discovered" (Josh used his fingers to indicate the quote/unquote marks) this mutated cross between the two. The resulting nasty little bugger they call 'Anthrola'. It has a rapid onset, an almost 100% takedown rate and it can be transported safely in freeze dried form, reconstituted into an aerosol and deployed by spray means without too much loss of effectiveness from the spray process."

"Also," he continued "with the closeness of anthrax to animals, it can be 'grown' if you like by infecting a bunch of animals. Take for instance a herd of pigs (pigs physiology is really close to humans), then expose them to one sample of Anthrola, and then once they die, or just before they die, take their organs out, blend into a super virus 'smoothy', freeze dry the result and repackage into a whole lot more samples than you started with. "

"Phewww!" whistled Linda "sounds like terrorist heaven!"

"You better believe it" responded Josh. "They were real anxious about telling us about this one, but they have no choice because if a terrorist could get hold of a sample they could very easily make everyone's life very very miserable and as First Responders we'd be on the front line to recognise it and take the appropriate actions."

"What are the appropriate actions then?" asked Liz

"Shoot the person where they stand so they can't infect any more, then run like hell and leave the country pretty much." answered Josh "By the time anyone not trained to recognise the early signs sees someone infected with Anthrola, they are highly infectious and the virus gets passed on."

"Here's how it might go." he said "Anthrola is deployed in aerosol form in a crowded area such as a subway. Over the peak rush hour period, a well organised group could release an aerosol can per train into the aircon system and infect everyone breathing on all the trains. Within just one day all those people start to sneeze and spread the virus. Depending on the aerosol potency and delivery efficiency, a very small percentage at the epicentre of the release point might die within the first 24 hours but the majority will remain fully mobile with nothing more than an annoying sneeze or cough for two days. At that point, they will start having increased symptoms that build to bloody diarrhoea, bleeding from all the other orifices and then death. There is no known antidote and due to the virology, it is not expected that there will be an antidote."

"It is, as I said, a nasty little bugger."

"and our answer for Scythe." he said slowly and quietly.

After a lengthy silence where no-one said anything, Tom asked

"If it's such a nasty little bugger as you say it is, how do you expect to get hold of it? It must be controlled to the nth degree!"

"It is" said Josh, but by the time I pass on my report to a couple of people here, I'm sure that it won't take long for someone official to request and get a sample for research purposes over here, and at that time, who do you think will be the courier?"

"Well, that's as maybe," retorted Tom, "but do you think you're going to be able to score a second sample at the same time? You must be dreaming!"

"No" responded Josh, "but I should be able to take a minute amount of the sample that's enough to start growing our own supply and not enough to be detected as missing. I know the style of packaging they use and I've got all the gear now to open the sample, remove what we need and repackage it so it looks as if nothing ever happened."

"Don't they track the number and weight of samples and confirm the number and weight that arrived for this kind of sample transfer?" Linda chimed in.

"Yep they do." Josh replied but you have no idea how small an amount I need, and such a small amount can be replaced weight-wise by a harmless 'filler' to either the virus spores or to the package itself to balance the weight so they are extremely unlikely to notice anything missing."

"There's a small risk that this would be detected, but Kiwi's are so trusting and I'm an approved person, trusted and such a nice guy they are unlikely to go looking." he added.

"So" he went on taking the lead since they were still a bit shell-shocked. "I'll take the job of sourcing and making all the necessary virus, Tom you can take the job of working out the method of simultaneous world-wide deployment, and you girls keep on with your jobs. Liz, we won't need quite as much fundraising as I thought we might since we won't need to recruit any 'heavies' to score us the bugs like we were thinking we might before. We'll need funding for some pigs, some international flights and whatever we need for Tom's deployment plan. That still won't be insignificant money, but it's less than we were thinking we'd need a month or so ago."

"Oh, and I'd like to propose a new code word. We've got "shit" as code for 'virus' in general terms, but I think we should also have another for the specific Anthrola virus. I suggest 'artichoke'. It's a word we're unlikely to use normally but feasible since it's a kind of spiky green vegetable and under a microscope Anthrola looks like a spiky green thing."

## **21 April (Thursday)**

This time it was Tom who was late - or rather, he was the one arriving after the other. Josh had actually been at the corner table of the pub for a wee while now as Tom guessed from the small pile of empty glasses. They'd starting using the corner table because it was a lot more private than the other booths and tables and increasingly, their conversations included words and themes not meant for other ears.

"Celebration?" he asked motioning at the pile with his own beer.

"Kind of" replied Josh "a small victory sure, but mostly it's just a matter of timing. I finished up with the guys at Lincoln early and decided that since it's Easter weekend, that I may as well come straight here."

"Small victory?" prodded Tom as he sipped appreciatively at his beer.

"Sure" replied Josh. "Lincoln University are going to contribute to the cost of building a bio-haz animal carcass disposal facility, just when I was going to have to build one for Scythe anyway."

"That **is** convenient" nodded Tom. "Why would they be doing that? Or don't I want to know?" he added with a slightly worried look.

"Nothing too secret" Josh answered nonchalantly "Just that they've decided that their university research should step up a bit in the area of genetically modified organisms (that's GMO's to us professionals), and therefore they need an approved facility to dispose of the corpses after dissection. What a happy co-incidence!" he added with a wry smile.



"So what's the plan for that?" queried Tom.

"Well, the guys at Lincoln put me in touch with a couple of farmers who might have appropriate sites. I dropped in to one of them on the way here and it seems pretty likely. His farm is along the edge of the Port Hills near Tai Tapu, and there's a spot there on his property which is of no use to him because there's a wee switchback in the line of the hill. It's created a small pocket of an 'almost' rock valley with a small cave and rocky hill all around. No good for crops and the stock just get themselves stuck in there, so he's more than happy for us to pay him some money to use it."

"How's the facility going to work?" asked Tom, his old engineering mind interested in problems and solutions.

"Well, I'm going to fence off the valley entrance with a two and a half metre tall wire mesh fence and a totally enclosed wire mesh roof, then enlarge the cave into the side of the hill further to create two spaces. One of the spaces will be a room housing just a three to four metre deep concrete lined offal pit, and the other will be an empty space which can be used as both an animal holding pen, and an autopsy room. The whole interior of the cave will be concrete lined, there'll be an airlock type door arrangement at the mouth of the cave, and the whole thing will be tested for an airtight seal. As a finishing touch, the exterior will be weathered and disguised to look like an old WWII bunker in case anyone goes up there to look, but the gate in the fence will feature a heavy duty lock and the airlock door behind the 'fake' exterior door will be as Hi-Tech as you've ever seen with a fingerprint reader and keypad level security."

"Sounds expensive" nodded Tom, "I'm glad someone else is going to help fund it."

"Well, I figure I always would have had to build something like it to provide a full bio-haz disposal service." responded Josh. "It's just finding someone prepared to pay for part of it up front that's happened a little faster than I expected."

"So tell me" continued Tom "How does the offal pit part work?"

"Much the same as a regular outdoor offal pit works except we have to put our own bacteria in to breakdown the carcasses since it's airtight. I dump in the carcasses and sprinkle them with a cocktail of bacteria that will break the carcasses down to just the bones."

"What about something for the smell?" Tom queried.

"No need." said Josh "Sure it'll smell in the room, but no-one's going to smell anything because it's a biohaz zone and the only people to be in there who want to keep living, will be wearing a fully self contained biohaz suit. No smell in the suit man!"

"Ha!" retorted Tom "I should have one of them for the men's room!"

"You got a spare three thousand have you?" Josh answered dryly.

"What?!!" Tom exclaimed

"Oh yes" said Josh. "But that's the full Biohaz level 4 suit though. You're trusting your life to it, it's not going to be cheap."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Anyway, so how about your side - getting anywhere with delivery?"

"Not a whole lot really." said Tom slowly. "I don't know that I have a full solution. All I've been able to come up with requires at least a two-pronged solution and maybe more."

"No-one said it was going to be easy man." replied Josh "So what have you got?"

"Well, for the large cities I reckon the best thing is, umm, let's say a timed release of 'air freshener' on the subway trains. Just like you said in your example. It's probably the easiest way to hit the maximum number of people simultaneously. I had thought of some kind of release on one central gathering - say at something like Times Square on New Year's eve, but that's too problematic in terms of coverage, and also increases the pressure on logistics to hit the single window of opportunity for the gathering, whereas a subway gig can be scheduled and subsequently rescheduled if required."

"Agreed" nodded Josh "what about the specifics of the deployment?"

"Relatively straightforward" Tom suggested "We'll either deliver the freeze-dried artichoke to each location and aerosolise it into 'air freshener', or aerosolise it here and deliver directly depending on shelf life. The tricky bit is then fitting them to the trains aircon system. We'll need to have help at each city's maintenance depot for that I suspect. But then we can all be well out of harms way by triggering it by cellphone. We just need a bunch of used/recycled phones with a single cloned sim card so they're all on the same number. One call, multiple outcomes!"

"You can do that?" queried Josh,

"Well, me personally, I can't just at the moment," cracked Tom with a grin, "but it is certainly possible with the right piece of equipment. Normally it's of not much use to someone because you can't ring anyone from a multi-clone phone, as the system sends the conversation to all the phones at once, which is no good for privacy, but if you want a network where everyone gets the same signal at the same time, it's a pretty simple way to do it. And it makes procuring the phones easier really."

"Okay, sounds good" admitted Josh, "and for the cities without subways and the country areas?"

"That's my problem." sighed Tom, "All I can think of is aerial deployment like a bunch of top-dressing planes, but that's going to be really hard to cover the land masses required and only gets the folk outside at the time."

"Tell me" he continued, "can 'artichoke' survive in water?"

Josh screwed up his forehead thinking back to the lecture. "Ahhhrmm, not directly I think, although if you were to sort of 'plastic coat' it with a suitable material it would keep it safe until it hit the stomach acids. I think I see where you're going with this."

"Yeash, I'm wondering if adding a wee dash of flavour to a reservoir would be appreciated." muttered Tom "It's still not very desirable, but it's all I've got so far. I was thinking subways is first choice, then reservoir, then top-dressing the remainder. Still I'm not sure if any of that works for some of the third world places . . ."

Josh was thinking. "I agree with your logic," he said finally, "and nothing else is jumping out at me as any better. I guess we have to go with that as a starting plan until someone comes up with anything better."

He emptied his glass and added "I'm pretty confident about the subway air freshener though, that's really quite a practical and elegant solution."

"So how much of this stuff do we need to make?" asked Tom.

"I've been doing some math. If we use full-grown pigs, each pig should yield around 4 to 5 kg of infected organs - that's heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, lungs, and as much of the arteries as can easily be chopped out. We could chop out more parts but the highest toxicity will come from those areas so

the other bits will mainly just dilute the virus strength. 4 to 5 kg from a few micrograms is a pretty good yield though."

"Then we need to freeze dry the slurry and break it down so that the particle size is about 1-5 microns for optimum respiratory system effect, and then freeze dry. That's no problem - I can easily get the machines to do that. We can then store and ship in this form. Once we aerosolise it, it will need to be used within 3 months or it will lose it's potency, hence we only do that immediately before the release where practical. Each gram will contain millions of Anthrola spores, so one gram will go an awful long way since only a couple of spores are necessary per person!"

"I'm thinking that to aerosolise the virus, because of it's potency, we should only need to use small cans - say 50ml spray cans, in which case we will need maybe only half a gram per can plus about 30 ml of my patent aerosolising agent. It's a magic 'cocktail' of chemicals designed to protect the spores while in liquid form, atomise into spray droplets nicely, and enhance the conditions for the respiratory system to pick up and grow the bug into the killer monster that it is. The propellant though might need some careful choice to prevent it altering the mix."

Tom interrupted him "There's a bag-on-valve system spray can system we can use to keep the propellant from affecting the virus agent. The propellant agent is in the can 'outside' a bag which contains the payload. The propellant squeezes the bag and pushes the agent out without being in contact and contaminating it. Plus this method will minimise deployment detection since it tends to be almost silent, won't be cold and of course is non-flammable. We can use readily available CO2 for the propellant in this case."

"It will also spray in any position too" added Tom "which could be important given the probable restrictions for mounting these to the trains."

"That too" agreed Josh.

"So, from what you just said, one pig should make enough virus for say 8 to 10 thousand cans?" calculated Tom.

"Yep" agreed Josh "and we're going to need a lot of cans. How many trains in each subway system typically?"

"I saw a reference that said there were about 70 cities around the world with subways, and London is the largest with 600 trains." Tom said "But I assume from what you said about the re-infection capabilities, that we won't need to target each train. If that's the case then we could allow say, 500 cans per city?"

"Yes, that sounds more than fair" Josh said, "or we could even go lower I think. I saw something that said there are over 55,000 cities in the world, so at 500 per city that would mean 5.5 million cans!! I would think that with some careful planning to pick the most densely populated trains, and supplement the trains with some key buildings as well, we can cut the number of cans per city easily in half. Let's go for a nice round 2 million cans."

"OK" Tom agreed "You're the expert on the virus spread, but I was going to add that even if you didn't get 100% of the people, if you got enough and at key locations so that the infrastructure ground to a halt, you would achieve the same effect anyway."

"How so?" quizzed Josh

"Well, if the transport system and electrical and phone systems are out of action, how many of the survivors are going to be able to do things? It won't take long before the shops are empty of edible food and then how will people be able to get more when they can't travel because the petrol pumps won't work and no-one else is making food anyway?"

Tom continued his mini lecture "Did you know that most cities only have a couple of days worth of food available at any one time because they rely on the continual replenishment of it with trucks, trains, planes and boats. If that system is broken, you might have a whole city of healthy people descend into riots, killing each other in order to compete for the limited resources. They do our job for them."

"Very good." said Josh. "That will mean finding good ways to get the rest of them isn't quite so important, but keep on it Tom. In the meantime, go ahead with your plan to source the air freshener cans. We don't need all of them at once so you can get a staged delivery totalling up to 2 million."

Okay" Tom nodded "if my mental arithmetic is correct, that means we will need to process about 250 pigs. Will you be able to manage that?"

"Well, that number is going to attract a little bit of attention perhaps, but if we spread it out over a period of time and source from several different farms it is definitely manageable." Josh replied "My wee lab room will only take a dozen or so pigs at a time anyway unless I jam them all together like sardines in a can, in which case we could go up to 20 or maybe even up to 40."

"Right" said Tom, I'll get back to the Chinese supplier I identified and give them the go-ahead for the cans and canning equipment."

"What do you think," he added "with that kind of quantity of cans, I reckon it will be impractical to aerosolise in-country which means we should hold it all here until just before party-day, then can and go. You said 3 months 'shelf life' right?"

Yep, 3 months." confirmed Josh "I agree, doing it here is preferable unless delivering and fitting them all is going to take too long."

"Another?" he asked as he stood up to head to the bar.

"Sure" answered Tom, "I'll step up to a dark this time."

"Dark it is." Josh said

## **29 April (Friday)**

"I found another couple of possible methods for delivery." enthused Tom . "In dense cities that do not have subways, we can deliver in any public building having a high people throughput as you already pointed out, and my breakthrough method by using car or bus exhaust pipes. Places like India could be perfect for this method and it would be easier than crop dusting."

"You can do that?" Josh exclaimed.

"Sure" replied Tom "The USA tested this with anthrax before 1970! I figure we can fit-out a few taxis or busses with the same rig as the subway trains but plumbed into the exhaust after the muffler. The warm exhaust will take the artichoke up to head height and envelop the area that people are walking through. Will the slightly higher than usual temperature of the exhaust mess up the effectivity?"

"Actually," said Josh, "if anything, it should slightly increase the effectiveness and speed up onset by pre-activating the virus in the aerosol suspension. That's a good one Tom, well done!"

"I hoped it would be easier and more effective than either the crop-duster or reservoir methods" said Tom

"Oh, I agree - much easier and much more effective I'd say." agreed Josh. "And it keeps it more standardised too which has got to be better for our logistics. How's the cans coming along?"

"The order's placed and they've indicated we should have them here towards the end of June." answered Tom. "It's about a month for the factory lead-time and another 3 weeks for the sea freight."

"So I'm not the only Managing Director sitting in this pub?" laughed Josh.

"Actually, you are" laughed Tom "Linda's the MD and I'm just a shareholder and Production Manager. We decided I shouldn't be the MD if I was still working my 'day job' and besides, it would look better for a woman to be the brains behind a company selling sweet smellies. What do us blokes know about sweet smells?!"

"Too true mate!" agreed Josh saluting Tom with his glass and taking a pull.

"On my end" he continued "I'll be heading over to the U S of A again in about two months time. My favourite research laboratory has almost got all it's ducks in a row to receive their very own samples of the main prize, and for some funny reason, yours truly has been selected as the courier!"

"Excellent." breathed Tom "Excellent. Alright then, I'll give you my shopping list of other stuff we need you to do. There's the sim card cloner, and blank sims for starters, and Linda wants you to set up a US Bank account in a fake name for one of her fundraising schemes. The easiest way to do this is not to use a fake name but to swipe someone's passport, social security card, and a utility bill and then go to the bank pretending to be them as VP of Company X."

"Whoa - how am I supposed to do that?" Josh demanded worriedly.

"Relatively easy" Tom soothed him. "When you arrive at the airport, you need to just hang around a bit, and identify someone who looks like you, or whose passport photo could look like you. Then you track them a bit until you get an opportunity to pilfer their passport and wallet. You've seen a couple of different ways to do that on that TV program 'The Real Hustlers' right? So then, you find their address - if it's not in their wallet you can look them up in the phone book. It doesn't have to be the actual persons address, but someone with the same name's address. Then go round to the address and lift a utility bill from their mailbox."

"With you so far" Josh said, "What's the utility bill for?"

"Proof of address" answered Tom. "So, with the identity complete you can go to any bank and open a personal account, or you can create a fictitious company letterhead document introducing Mr X as VP or Director of said company with authorisation to open a bank account with full signing rights. Make sure it's a bank that gives you internet banking capability."

"Nice," whistled Josh. "Ok, I can do that. And I suppose we can use the same identity to open more than one account and in more than one location?"

"Absolutely." agreed Tom "in fact Linda wants at least 2 accounts on the west coast and the same on the east coast. Ideally a couple of well known banks and one or two less well known. And if you can get an account that comes with a credit card as well, then all the better. But that's probably less likely because we understand that establishing a credit history is necessary before they dish out a credit card. Still, if you picked a successful looking business man as the target, he might have a suitable history already on record."

"Consider it done" said Josh. "Anything else?"

"Nothing major" said Tom but I'll give you a list."

## **23 June (Thursday)**

Tom was well pleased. Linda released the handle on the can crimper and took out a perfectly sealed 50ml air freshener can that she had just assembled - minus content is all! It had worked perfectly first time out of the box and Tom figured they were now well on their way.

They had just received the aerosol can crimper and a good stock of the two halves of the empty cans and lids sourced directly from China. They had asked the supplier to provide the cans plain white labelled as "Glad Air freshener" as an 'almost' rip-off of "Glade". They looked the part though and Tom was absolutely confident they would not earn a second look from any customs or MAF folk.

Along with the cans and semi-automated gassing and crimping machine, they'd also got matching automated air freshener dispensers with the cans. They had even been able to have the Chinese supplier convert the dispensers for them by adding a jack plug which can be connected to a standard cellphone headphone jack. The mod allowed you to turn the dispenser on remotely and have the timed release puffs do their thing until the can was empty. They had decided that it would be most effective to have regular puffs of about 2 seconds duration every 5 minutes in order to make the spray go further and expose it to new people getting on and off and moving about the trains. And for the bus dispensers, they wanted a 2 second puff about every 1 minute assuming it was doing a frequent stop route. The dispenser allowed you to fine tune the duration and frequency of the puffs once it was turned on so that different situations could be catered for at the location.

They didn't even need to make any conversion work to the phone. Plugging the phone headphone into the aerosol dispenser meant that when the cellphone was rung, instead of the speaker making a noise, the signal triggered and latched the aerosol dispenser on, to dispense the spray according to the preset controls. And if you didn't connect a cellphone, well, it just worked as a normal automatic dispenser.

All they needed now, was to produce the virus, aerosolise it and then load it into the aerosol cans with the propellant.

Tom had originally thought he would need to brush up his soldering skills by making the speaker jack modification himself, but given the quantity they had ordered, he'd been worried about the amount of time it would take him and had asked the supplier if they could do it. For them it was no problem and had only added a few tens of cents to the unit price.

It was worth it for the amount of time it would save, the improved quality and corresponding guarantee of it working first time, plus, the fact that since it was factory made, it looked real and would draw no inspection when they sent them through to the destination.

His next job was to complete the sourcing of the cellphones, but that was underway too. He'd put the word out to the cellphone provider stores that he was co-ordinating cellphones for the third world. They would (so he'd told them) take the "empty" recycled cellphone "bodies" and distribute them through various in-country aid agencies to needy people overseas. This would have a dual effect of obtaining free phones which would help the budget, plus, the phones would be the older models which made cloning the sim cards easier. With the same 'program' in place in several countries, and the rate at which people traded in their perfectly usable cellphones for the latest model, meant Tom had few worries about getting enough phones to receive the one call they needed to.

Tom had been surprised that the process for cloning a sim card was going to be so easy – well, it appeared that it would be, but of course time would tell. From what he'd found out, the older phones could work with a cloned sim using an inexpensive cloning device able to be bought across the counter – legally (for about USD\$20 from what he could see!). Josh had the details for the right kind of cloner and the blank sim cards. Getting enough of the blank sims might be tricky as to avoid creating any suspicion, they'd only be able to buy 4 or 5 at a time at any one shop. And there were less shops that sold the blank sims compared to the loaded sims. But if the number of trips that Josh was able to make could be ramped up, and if they can recruit others then it would be fairly easy.

"So what do you reckon Lindy-Lou?" Tom asked his wife with a laugh. "Do you think I should quit the day job and go into the air freshener business?"

"Well it sure looks like there's enough cans here" she said looking at the small mountain of cartons, "but I don't think it pays as well as the day job. Sorry, but I think you need to keep working for the wallies in charge."

"Ah well," sighed Tom "c'est la vie!"

## **25 June (Saturday)**

Josh settled back into his seat contentedly. He patted the lid of the small chilly bin which was chained to his wrist on the seat beside him, and smiled wryly. If only the rest of the plane-load of people knew what was going to come from that small container with the distinctive yellow and black logo on all sides, they would not be as happy and excited as they all were.

With this piece of the puzzle in his hands, all the critical elements of the plan were in place, and they were ready to launch into the next phase. It was now just a matter of time and they could be taking Scythe out 'into the wild'.

The trip had gone exactly as planned, and his checked luggage held all the things that Tom had put on his 'shopping list'.

Back at BioHaz Services, the lab was ready with super accurate scales, the fake spore filler, and the packaging and machine to reseal the package of biological agent.

Everything was set, and the world was waiting for them.

He signalled the flight attendant and asked for a cognac. The moment was worthy of it!

## Chapter 4 - Triggering the Terror

### **21 October (Friday)**

"Merci, mon ami. Au 'voir." he flipped his phone off and put it back in his pocket. The phone was a so-called untraceable cellphone, one of the several that Josh had bought on his last courier trip to America for cash at a kiosk at various train stations around New York.

Tom was highly pleased with himself. He'd just confirmed a key piece of the puzzle for the 'air freshener' deployment plan - the angle that had been a gaping hole in their plans.

His plan for the biological agent deployment called for a veritable army of people in each country to fit the air freshener systems to the various subway trains, public buildings and busses necessary to expose the maximum number of people to the aerosolised virus. While fitting the systems could be as easy as tie-wrapping them inside the grille of the aircon, the problem was the sheer number of systems to fit in a short space of time while maintaining secrecy. If they tried to recruit a bunch of people, it would only take one of them to spill the beans in the wrong place and the whole project would be in jeopardy.

They each had several contacts all around the world as a result of their business dealings, but this was not enough, and some of them could not be used for this project. Tom had tapped one of his school friends, early in the piece to try and address the need. Michael, had joined the Army straight out of school. He was seeking high adventure and after a five year stint with not enough action to suit his tastes, he'd joined the French Foreign Legion. He'd done well and learnt a lot of useful skills - useful for a would-be terrorist at least!

They had always kept in touch and a couple of months ago when Mike had been on leave back home, Tom had caught up with him and sounded him out about a 'project' he was working on. He'd told Mike he was working on a 'secret scent' research project and they wanted to launch the scent globally on the same day without people being aware of it, and assess the effect it had on behaviour. He had described the delivery method and asked him if he thought he could generate enough contacts to co-ordinate the delivery of the cans, working out the best trains, buildings and busses to target, and fit the systems. He could tell Mike had been a bit sceptical about the nature of the project but he hadn't taken long to reply that he thought he could go a long way toward it.

Mike had just confirmed to him that by using all his buddies from the Legion who had drifted off to other work - usually in security, bodyguard or mercenary jobs around the world, that he had what he thought was a workable network in place that would cover all the world except for Australia and Japan. That was more than close enough for Tom, as between their other contacts, they could cover those two.

What a relief!

When Mike was back home on his next leave, Tom would tell him the REAL goings on and leave it to him when and how he told his network of helpers. It would be important for them to know not to go sniffing the 'scent' or do a test spray when they received the cans. And once they knew, they were more inclined not to leak the story or they would not be guaranteed survival - for if they were being questioned about the plan, they could not be on a plane winging its way to safety in New Zealand!



Mike had the network of organisers - a collection of 'country managers' and 'city managers'. The city managers would analyse the ebb and flow of the population to work out the best placement locations for the cans for maximum coverage. In many cases, the city managers would also then be the ones fitting the devices, but in other cases they would have help from others such as subway and bus company maintenance workers who had legitimate access to simplify the task. The city manager would refer to the country manager to advise how long it would take to fit the devices, and when was the best chance. The country manager would channel all the information back to Mike in summarised form and subsequently distribute the devices at the right time when they arrived.

Once the devices were all deployed, those in the know would then be on the next flight out of there and headed for safety. Tom and Josh would be able to initiate the devices with the cellphone numbers they had programmed into the relevant cloned sim cards for each of the different country managers.

There was still plenty that could go wrong, but with good planning and tight information control, they were hopeful that enough of the agent would be deployed to shut down the rest of the world.

Tom opened his phone again and sent a text message to Josh - "Hermes in place".

Josh wouldn't reply. He would know what that meant, and their schedule still left plenty of time for discussion, but Tom knew, he would want to know their network of 'mailmen' was one less problem to deal with.

They were now theoretically ahead of schedule, since they'd allowed more time for setting up the network of 'deliverers', but in real terms the schedule was going to be determined by how quickly they could 'grow' the Anthrola virus and source the funds they needed for the rest of the cans, phones, sim cards and paying the people what they needed to conduct the operations.

The virus stocks were growing at the rate of between 10 and 20 pigs at a time, but in order to avoid suspicion of a mass purchase of so many pigs, they were having to space them out quite a lot. Each batch of pigs took about half a week to process due to the fast effect the bugs had. They were just over a third of the way through the production of their target volume of Anthrola material, and the current stockpile of about 400 kg of freeze-dried material was starting to fill out the little store room in the 'Batcave' lab quite nicely.

Tom had helped Josh a couple of times with the process of turning pigs into virus, but after the first time when they had struggled with the practical effects of trying to lift a full-grown dead pig up onto the 'autopsy' table, Josh had developed a few tricks to make life easier. Now that they had a small ramp and a method to entice the pig to walk up onto the table before it was dispatched with a bolt to the brain and then butchered for it's organs with the carcass cut into manageable slabs to cart to the offal pit, the process could be done by one person.

It was indeed a messy and physically tiring process, but at least there was no smell.

And for storage, Liz had come up with an economically shaped (and priced) glass storage container that was supposed to be used for bulk storage of pasta or other kitchen pantry foodstuffs. With it's rectangular shape and rubber ring type seal, it was perfect for stacking the freeze dried material in storage without wasting much space.

Yes, Tom thought to himself, it was all coming together.

**03 February 2012 (Friday)**

"How'd the lecture go cowboy?" Tom asked

"Pretty well I guess" replied Josh "They were certainly excited by it all and are promising immediate review of the arrival procedures at customs."

They were back at their regular haunt sipping their traditional Friday afternoon beers. Josh earlier that week taken part in delivering a series of lectures, along with one of the research doctors from the lab that had been messing around with the Athrola virus, to the MAF & Customs folks at the International airports at Auckland, Wellington, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Queenstown.

He hadn't missed noticing the handful of people in suits that looked a little out of place at the briefing in Wellington and he'd taken them for GCSB mates of Fin, since the lecture had presumably come about because of the conversation they'd had on Fin's jet boat during the Christmas holidays.

It had been part of the plan all along to make sure the immigration folk were ready and waiting to detect any potential victims and stop them entering the country just as they would try and minimise any other disease such as when the swine flu epidemic had spread so rapidly due to the prevalence of air transportation making the spread so rapid.

New Zealand in particular, had shown a rapid onset of swine flu brought in by air passengers and now that they knew about this wonderfully lethal biological entity they were keen to have a plan in place to prevent it coming here.

Between Josh and the research doctor, they'd been able to advise the immigration officials about symptoms, and thankfully, the distance that NZ has from everywhere else that is usually a barrier to trade, would now work to their advantage, as anyone exposed to the virus at an overseas port and flying to NZ, would by the time of arrival, have developed sufficient symptoms that could be detected to a trained observer, and indeed since the virus is so infectious, everyone else on the same plane would be similarly affected. Immigration control 'simply' needed to look for a whole planeload of coughing and sneezing people with slightly elevated head temperatures to take appropriate action.

"When we left them, they were debating what constituted 'appropriate action' for a planeload of infected people." Josh told Tom. "It seems that not letting them off the plane, keeping the doors sealed with the plane parked as far away from anyone else as possible under a perimeter of armed sharpshooters, is their current theory of 'appropriate'!"

"Poor buggers!" mused Tom quietly.

"Well, they're also wondering if it would be 'appropriate' to plug into the planes aircon and pipe in some cyanide gas as a more 'humane' method of control instead of leaving them to suffer and tie up the sharp-shooter and other expensive resources." Josh reported dryly. "The important thing from our perspective is that they're now fully aware, know what to look for and are prepared to seal the border at the first hint of an outbreak. That means we're safe here anyway - as long as they remain vigilant."

"Right" sighed Tom.

Josh thought Tom was a lot more accepting of the consequences of their plan these days. He himself, through dealing with the biohazard materials with his new business and particularly with the pigs, was completely accepting of the realities and he thought that Tom, who was initially shocked by the whole thing, was now much more on board and committed.

"What's the latest from Mike?" Josh asked to steer the conversation back to safer ground.

"All fine." Tom responded. "Hermes is fully prepped. The city plans are all ready and all they need is the stuff and the go-ahead. I saw Mike the other week actually and told him the real story. He's surprisingly fine with it and I think he'd guessed it was something like that. These military types are just too suspicious!"

"Well, what did you think he'd think given your 'secret scent' story!" exclaimed Josh.

"Well I suppose it could have been believable to anyone other than a person trained to be paranoid, but we always knew we were relying on his trust of me." Tom replied.

"Yes" answered Josh, "and he's done extremely well for us. Is he going to pass the news on do you think?"

"He will to his close buddies, but he said that for the rest, the cover story was sufficiently believable that he doesn't want to risk the word getting out too far. He also said that a by-product of this is that it will also mean that we have less funds to find as they're getting paid after the fact . . ."

"Ha-ha!" laughed Josh "I like this Mike fellah more and more each time! He shall be admitted to the inner sanctum of the Josh and Tom club forth-with!"

"He already was." retorted Tom, "You just didn't know it!"

"Fair enough" answered Josh. "In other news, we are now at about three quarters of our way to fully stocking the batcave larder. I reckon another 2 or maybe 3 more months will see it full."

"Good progress." Tom agreed. "And Linda's stocks of air freshener cans and dispensers is now complete. I just need to collect a few more cellphones and we're set."

"Yeah" answered Josh "I've seen the containers. How many is it now? Looks like about 4 of the 40 footers."

"Yep," agreed Tom "there's another one hiding behind them - it's four full of the cans and another with the dispensers. Two million even small cans takes up a not insignificant amount of space!"

"What about the cellphones?" queried Josh.

"Oh yeah" remembered Tom "They're a little bit bigger. I've got another 5 containers worth of them parked at a mates warehouse!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Josh "not bad for a 'small' enterprise!"

"Indeed" agreed Tom. "So, let's see. If you're ready with the last of the artichoke by say end of April, we could take leave and process the 'secret scent', fill the cans and ship it all in the first week of May. We should send the cellphones ahead separately from the cans to avoid suspicions so that doesn't impact the delivery schedule. The longest duration trip for the air freshener sea freight is 3 weeks, so that indicates end of May with 2 months shelf life left. If we then allow 2-3 weeks for the country managers to distribute the city packs and the city managers to fit them, everything could be in place by end of June with 1 month shelf life left. I did a little checking before - the northern hemisphere summer solstice is June 21. If we had everything in place by then, that could be a 'poetic' time to ring the phones!"

"That might be too poetic and too tight a timeframe." Josh opinioned. "Yes we want to go as soon as everything's in place rather than run out the shelf

life. Plus the risk of detection increases the longer we leave things in place and unused. I think we work to that timetable but keep it fluid. At any time we can ring the phones regardless of whether they're all in place or not but we monitor it based on the country manager reports."

"Right" said Tom "As part of their brief, they will all get their own throw-away phone to use for updates by text message. We can monitor and review day by day considering placement, and if it's important, the weather patterns."

"Perfect weather for increasing the deployment effectiveness means an inversion layer." Josh responded. "It's unlikely to occur all over the world on the same day, but yes, we can monitor weather in case there are any significant adverse weather like extended rain."

"Okay" said Tom "Is it a plan?"

"It's a plan" agreed Josh

Tom took out his phone - his disposable one, flipped it open and wrote a text message "Xpect delivery end May. Party-day circa end June. OK?"

"Checking with Mike" he said as he showed Josh the message before hitting send.

"Good idea" agreed Josh finishing his beer.

"Same again?"

## **21 April (Saturday)**

It was probably going to be the last outside BBQ for a while as the Autumn weather was getting noticeably colder each day.

It was (another) Go, No-Go 'meeting' and the two couples reviewed their plans and progress against them.

"I have a full larder at the batcave." reported Josh. "And I have all the ingredients and bowls ready for my special 'soup' as well."

"Oh, and the border control folk are as prepped as they're going to be to shut us off from the rest of the world."

"The sims are programmed and they and the cellphones are already on the boats. Plus, the Hermes network is fully ready to rock and roll." said Tom.

"The money has been tracking along quite nicely and there's plenty ready for the shipping, with bonuses available for the team as they arrive here after their work is done." chimed in Liz.

"So, it sounds like we are all go to mix up Josh's 'soup' and get this show on the road." summarised Linda. "Are there any last minute 'No-Go' items or personal doubts?"

They all looked at each other and then perhaps surprisingly it was Tom that broke the silence.

"No, let's go." he said firmly.

"Go", "Go", "Go" they each nodded in agreement.

"Right" said Tom "I'll confirm my leave for the week after next. From the 28<sup>th</sup> until it's done we are soup making and can filling."

"Right" took over Linda. "Josh, you're on soup, production, Tom you're on canning, and Liz, you and I are on boxing, shipping labels and co-ordination. If we ship as they become ready, and send the furthest away ones first, they might all arrive around the same time."

"Just make sure you decontaminate the air freshener containers after canning so we can handle the boxes safely without the full protection." chimed in Liz.

"Absolutely!" agreed Tom and Josh together.

"And after they're done and on their way, Tom you need to keep us fully up to speed with in-country arrival and following progress." Linda reminded him. "I'll have a country list going to monitor and summarise so we can make sure we don't miss anyone."

"Mike would be a bit miffed after all the hard work he's done for us if we rang the phones without him!" Tom agreed with a laugh.

"Yes" said Linda. "Oh, but that reminds me that Yoshi in Japan, and Sanjeeb in Nepal, haven't accepted the party invitation."

As part of the cover story for getting their friends from around the world to come to the safety of NZ, they had invented a party to celebrate Tom's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Despite his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday actually being in December, they'd advised everyone it would be in late June so as to take advantage of the northern hemisphere summer holidays and to avoid the NZ Christmas rush.

"I'll talk to them" said Tom, "but if all else fails, regrettably, we can't not go just because of them."

"Agreed" they nodded "Well, I think that's the majority ticked off, so I think we should pause and make a toast."

"Scythe" they all raised their glasses and drank thoughtfully.

## **15 June (Friday)**

For a change, Linda and Liz had joined Josh and Tom at their regular session at the pub. Everything seemed to be in place and they were going through the checklist. Tom was the main source of the updates as it was now all down to the reports from the countries.

As project manager, Linda started though, to summarise the list as she knew it.

"We have the go ahead from all of Europe, Africa, Russia, Asia, Australia, and South America. We also have all your friends outside of the project either here now or arriving in the next few days."

"Right" agreed Tom, "and I've just had a text from USA saying that everything is in place there too."

"So now we just wait for the country managers to get here." said Liz.

"I guess we allow 2 days for that, meaning party day could be Monday." suggested Josh.

"Monday here would be Sunday in most of the rest of the world. I reckon if we were to time the artichoke release for Monday morning rush hour in each local time zone - that would have the greatest effectiveness." Tom suggested. "I think on Monday I'll take the rest of the week off work as if we start releasing artichoke in America, it will be Monday night/Tuesday very early morning and we'll need to follow the sunrise around the world from there."

"Won't that give the people on the other side of the world some advance warning once the symptoms start to show?" queried Liz. "It might give them a chance to avoid the release."

"It's possible." mused Josh "but I think releasing there on a Sunday night is not the best use of the air freshener and our best chance is as Tom said to follow the sunrise at each location. The chances of e.g. USA detecting and telling the rest of the world they have a problem within 24 hrs is remote I would say."

"Well then," suggested Linda, "since the Pacific is largely empty space and we're not specifically targeting the islands there, how about starting the release in Australia & Russia's east coast for the Monday evening homeward rush and simultaneously on the African west coast for the Monday morning rush and follow the dual sunrise/sunset from both points from there? That way there's a much reduced time window for the alert to be raised and you still hit the peak travel times."

"That's got a lot of promise" agreed Josh, "but it increases the risk of having it appear over here, as the plane ride is only 3.5 hrs from Australia's east coast which might mean an infected carrier from say Sydney could slip in before the symptoms are present. I would say that's a very real, and an unacceptable risk."

"Yes" agreed Tom, "so how about we take the concept of the simultaneous Monday night and Monday morning release but just miss out PNG and Australia to start with and put them later for Tuesday morning?"

"I can buy that" Josh agreed. "Singapore is a 10hr flight which is plenty of time for symptoms, and Indonesia and Philippines hub through Singapore so we can safely include them in the first wave."

"I think that means a 16:30 Monday afternoon is the first H-Hour then as from memory, Russia east coast is on the same time zone as us." commented Liz

"So assuming the last country managers confirm egress by then, Monday night is party-night." agreed Josh. "Let's convene at BioHaz Services at 3:30pm. I'll have Mike along - he's earned it, and if you girls can bring along some takeaways for dinner, and food & drink for the rest of the day. I'll set up a map board, whiteboard and work table and curtain off an area with a couple of fold down beds. After the initial flurry, we should take shifts to make sure we're fresh enough to not make a mistake."

"I'll bring in our big screen TV and borrow some spare monitors and PC's from work so we can access as many different websites as possible." said Tom. "You did get Sky installed didn't you Josh? Can you get them to add that 'multi-room' to it on Monday morning so we can monitor multiple channels at once?"

"Will do" said Josh. "Should be quite a show."

### **18 June (Monday) PARTY DAY 1530 hrs NZST**

The warehouse space at BioHaz Services certainly looked like a command and control HQ for some kind of global event. The large world map with time zone's marked on it commanded the cork-board in 'centre-stage', flanked on each side by one of two the large screen TV's - one of which was selected to CNN world news and the other, for now, selected to the Sky movie channel. At a right angle to this line, was a line of 4 desks, each with two or three computer monitors connected to PC's or laptops. Two of the screens showed the world clock website with the country list status summary spreadsheet and their various planning documents open on the split screen view, the next featured the on-line international arrivals screens from Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown International airports with the other

half of the screen showing what looked like a radar map of the country. Another had several of the worlds news websites, while still another had the webmail accounts up. On the same desk that the airport arrivals screens were at, were 4 radios which were tuned to the approach frequencies for Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, with the 4<sup>th</sup> tuned to Queenstown but able to be flipped to the Palmerston North preset channel. At right angles to the row of desks and facing the map and TV screens was a couple of sofa's and low tables for food and drinks. Over at the back wall, a good way behind this, was a screen giving some privacy to a couple of fold up cot-beds and a couple of double mattresses. Over by Josh's office space, the fridge, zip, sink and microwave kitchenette had been supplemented into a makeshift kitchen with the addition of a folding table and an electric hob. Josh had even thought to make sure the toilet was well stocked with loo paper!

"Well" said Tom as he set the bags of food down, "looks like we're all set to go Josh."

"What's this?" he added pointing at the radar-like screen that had the outline map of NZ on it.

"That's a live feed from the Airways Air Traffic Control system." Josh answered. "Each square or diamond is an aircraft. The solid line shows the expected flight location 2 minutes in the future and the dotted line is it's recent flight-path history. The flight details are shown beside each one when you zoom in."

"Neat!" exclaimed Tom. "How'd you get access to that?"

"Not so hard" Josh replied "The application is available to legitimate businesses in the aviation arena. A friend of a friend works at Air New Zealand and they of course have an account so I am using his password."

"OK then - to business. Let's have a last go around." said Linda reaching for her checklist. "Mike - in-country prep?"

"All countries go, and all country and city managers that we care about have confirmed safe egress and arrival here." said Mike.

"And a great job too Mike." said Tom "We really appreciate all your efforts - I really doubt we could have pulled it off without you."

"Ahhh, pas du tout, mais merci m'sieur" Mike made an extravagant bow with a flurry of his left hand and a big grin on his face.

"Josh - NZ border control?" Linda continued.

"As prepped as can be without painting them a complete picture. If necessary I'll send them an anonymous text at the appropriate time, and you would have seen I've got the BioHaz Services wagon outside prepped to go, as I expect that at some point in the proceedings, I'll be called to the airport to verify an outbreak of Anthrola on one of the incoming flights."

"Tom - device triggering?"

"Ready" responded Tom "On the screen over there and backed up on all the computers is the master list of phone numbers for each region. There's a list ordered by number on one screen and another ordered by country on the other, with a split screen view ordered by NZ time of triggering. On that same screen we've got Skype call-out running and two disposable cellphones available to make the calls. Procedure will be to have 'Call-guy' read the number from the NZ time list as they punch it in to the cellphone and "Check-guy" verify it from the number ordered list before authorising "Call-guy" to connect the call. Since we will have no feedback that the cellphone rang the devices, we'll repeat the call on Skype."

"Got it" nodded Linda "Everyone got it?"

"Check", "Oui", "Roger", everyone nodded.

"Timing?" Linda quizzed looking at Tom.

"Confirming H-hour is 16:30 NZST which is also 1630 local time in Kamchatka on the east coast of Russia. Japan is three hrs later at 1930, Beijing an hour later at 2030 etc. On some maps Japan and the east coast look like they should be on the same time zone but due to the curvature of the earth the lines of longitude are quite different, and you have to remember that some places have Daylight Saving and others don't."

"For the morning rush, 1630 hrs NZST corresponds to 0730 hrs local in Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, down to Madagascar, but excludes Iran, UAE and Oman. Moscow also misses by one hour so we'll pick them up later with the home-time rush."

"Fine" said Linda, "and the last call?"

"Last calls will be PNG, and Australia, ending with Perth at 1130 tomorrow just before lunch."

"Ok" said Linda, "and let's make sure to use only 24 hour clock references from now to avoid any confusion alright?" she asked rhetorically.

As everyone nodded she then asked "Roster?" looking at Liz.

"Right." said Liz. "I'm guessing everyone will be too wired to sleep for a while even though not much should be happening, so I've got us all on until around 9 - sorry, 2100 hrs. Then since Josh might be called out anytime from around 0600 hrs but probably not 'til later, Mike & Linda, I've got you on that first shift with Tom, me & Josh relieving you at 0300 - just after the last call for the bulk of the world. After that there's just a few 'odds and sods' calls to make, so Mike & Linda can sleep from then until whenever they like as the calling will be finished by lunch time and it should be a while before any news starts coming in except for from whenever NZ closes its borders."

"Right, any last questions?" asked Linda.

Mike piped up "Well, unless you did it yourselves, and it doesn't sound like you did, it doesn't seem like you are worrying about the Pacific Islands and most of the other small islands of the world."

"That's right." confirmed Tom. "We decided that due to their isolation, the threat from them was minimal and the complexity of getting them all was a little trickier so we decided that we wouldn't specifically target them and if they survive intact then all the better for the world."

"D'accord" Mike nodded.

"OK" said Linda "H-Hour approaches. Final chance to call it quits. Are you really sure about this? Last chance to walk away - although with a couple of million BioHaz level 4 devices lurking in public places I'd say it was past that now, but still. We can stop now if you want. Call it."

There was only a short pause and then they all chimed in - "Go".

"Right then" Linda stood up sweeping them along, "let's go. Everyone to their posts. Final checks. Let's make history!"

**18 June (Monday) 1620 hrs NZST**



"Let's go now" said Josh "Everything's checked and double checked and the respective rush will have started. The spray will last for ages so I'd rather launch a little early than miss a few thousand extra prospective victims."

He had echoed all their thoughts. The waiting was getting to them.

"Ok" said Tom, "First target Eastern Russia, Kamchatka, 1621 local time. Cell number +64 23 734 734." as he called the number he was punching it into the disposable phone on his desk. He paused with his finger hovering over the 'send' key.

"+64 23 734 734, Kamchatka, 1621 local time, Check." responded Liz checking both the number log and the time screen.

Tom looked around "Yes?"

They all nodded.

His finger hovered and then stabbed down. "Alea jacta est" he muttered to himself echoing Julius Caesar's sentiments so long ago, as the signal was instantly transmitted into the air and up to the top of the world there to be relayed to several hundred cloned phones strategically sited around the eastern tip of Russia causing them to enable the 'air freshener' packages to commence dispensing their lethal load in the programmed bursts.

There was silence for about 2 seconds, and then all of a sudden, behind the map board, an air-horn shattered the silence. They all jumped back with startled and guilty looks on their faces.

All but Tom, who laughed and walked over to the board, reached around and unplugged a cellphone silencing the klaxon.

"Just a little back-up test." He said to their accusing looks "This phone is a clone of the ones Mike sent to Kamchatka, so the system works - well at least here anyway!"

"You sod!" his wife standing by the board with the black vivid marker ready to colour in the map around Kamchatka gave him a solid punch in the shoulder. "Don't you dare do that again!"

They all laughed and the tension was relieved.

"Okay" he said, "moving right along. Backup call via Skype out."

Liz repeated the number back to him as he punched it into the Skype keypad and pressed connect.

They crossed Kamchatka off their lists noting the actual time in the margin, and then moved to the next line on the list. "Madagascar, 0725 local, +64 23 734 735." His finger hovered again over the cellphone 'send' key.

"+64 23 734 735, Madagascar and east Africa zone 1, 0725 local - Check." responded Liz completing the double check.

Again Tom's finger speared the little green key sending the signal halfway around the world.

"Read-back" he asked as he moved to the Skype keypad.

"+64 23 734 735 Madagascar" Liz confirmed.

"Done" said Tom ruling it off the list and moving down to the next one.

"Ah, the first of our special cases." Tom breathed. "Target Africa One."

"What or who is 'Target Africa One'?" queried Linda.

"It's a potential hot-bed of trouble in the form of a militia camp with ties to no particular party in a secret compound in the Congo." Mike advised. "I want to make particularly sure of them so we have a special package for them. They're an hour behind Madagascar and take their morning exercise at 0630. I have someone parked up nearby with a radio controlled model plane to do a little 'top dressing' over the exercise yard. Tom's call will signal the guy to go ahead with the flight."

"So the guy doesn't get out?" queried Liz.

"Nope." answered Mike. "He doesn't know the true nature of the spray but he has a personal reason to do the job and he won't tell anyone. He is expendable - just as the other couple of similar 'special package' people we have lined up are."

"How many other special packages do you have?" asked Linda.

"3 in the USA, 2 in the Middle East, 1 in Spain, 2 in 'the Stans'/Russia, and 26 for the Aum Shinrikyo in Japan."

"Ok" said Tom, "special package Target Africa One, 0629 local time, +64 23 734 736." He began writing the brief text message "Launch on sight" while Liz checked and read back the confirmation.

They got into the rhythm of the process of reading and confirming the location/numbers with Linda colouring in the map as soon as Tom hit the 'send' key on the cellphone. After a short while they sat back at the end of the first block on the list and waited for the sun to move further around the globe. The black band was clearly visible up the east coast of Africa, through part of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the western edge of Russia. The east coast of Russia was, by contrast, currently just a black splodge.

Josh and Mike had congregated at the incoming flights and ATC feed work station and had begun figuring out when the first plane with any possibility of infected carriers on board would arrive.

"I guess Japan will be the first place with direct flights here so that's a strong candidate." said Mike

"Flight time to Auckland is around 10hrs, so if they get hit at 1930 NZST that means 0530 is the earliest an affected flight could arrive. Are there any flights leaving Japan for NZ around or after 1630 Japan local time?"

"The Narita to Christchurch flight leaves several hours after H-Hour and arrives around 1000 so that's a definite one to watch."

"Next for release is Korea, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia and moving into the rest of Asia. The typical Asia flights arrive to Auckland in the afternoon and into Christchurch in late morning."

"Looks like a Korean Air flight (KE129) arrives from Seoul at 0815 into Auckland. Fastest flight time is 11hrs 15 and with their local H-Hour at 1930 here, this is one we need to watch."

"There's one from Shanghai into Auckland arrives 0630 but it departed Shanghai mid afternoon so it left before the local H-Hour."

"And Brunei flight time is 9hrs 45 mins and their H-hour is 2030hrs so that means 0615 is the earliest possible NZ arrival. The scheduled flight departs Brunei 1145 local time arriving 0140 but that obviously misses H-Hour until the next day."

"Singapore has the same H-Hour and roughly the same flight time as Brunei. The regular flight into Christchurch arrives at 1030 and that is one to watch."

"So it sounds like the earliest possible time that we might want to shut the borders is coalescing around 0600, but the more practical time is around 0800 coincident with the Korean Air plane." concluded Mike.

"Sounds right" agreed Josh "and we need to monitor the incoming air traffic from say 0500."

"Right" said Mike. "That's your shift."

### **19 June (Tuesday) 0615 hrs NZST**

The two black bands on the map had closed up on each other in the small hours of the morning as Oman, Dubai and the last of the Europe and Russian cities Monday 1630hrs home-time rush hour H-Hour fell at half past midnight NZST.

Two hours later, the Monday morning 0730 morning rush hour black band connected up to the first black band at the Russian east coast as California and Alaska were triggered together at 0230. Hawaii was added to the world of blacked in countries by Josh after Tom and Liz had made the call three quarters of an hour earlier at 0530.

At the 0300 shift change, they had decided to let Josh sleep a bit longer since out of all of them, he would have the most tiring day ahead if he was called out to verify if a biohazard existed on an arriving plane. They woke him just before the call to Hawaii.

In the couple of hours between the start of their shift and waking Josh, they had double checked the Skype call log against the master cellphone number list to verify that each country that appeared black on the map actually *had* been called. They all had of course - it had gone like clockwork. Not bad for a bunch of first-time terrorists Tom had thought!

With the exception of PNG and Australia, the world was now totally exposed to the only killer virus with no antidote. And these two countries were only temporary exceptions - they would be added to the list in a couple more hours time.

Mike and Linda were still asleep.

Josh was checking the ATC feed and airport arrivals, Liz was monitoring the internet news channels, as was Tom, although he was splitting his attention also between the TV news feeds. Nothing had been reported yet and there were no unexpected flights, but Liz was wondering if the CNN reporter based in Japan was sneezing more than would normally be expected, and Josh was watching the Korean Air flight KE129 still 2 hrs away, carefully.

Their bio-warfare HQ was humming along peacefully with nothing much to do when out of the blue one of the cellphones chirruped loudly in the early morning silence.

They all looked at each other in shocked surprise as Tom reached toward it and picked it up off the shelf. It wasn't the one he'd been using to call the numbers, but his other 'disposable' one he'd used for communicating with Mike and the country managers emergency backup.

"What the hell? Who could this be?" Tom asked as he flipped it open.

"It's a text message, but I don't recognise the number" he said as he opened the message and then he stopped, stock still in shock.

"Wake Mike" he said slowly looking at Liz.

"What is it mate?" Josh asked worriedly coming over to Tom's side as Liz darted off to wake Mike.

"Just one word - look" and he showed the message to Josh.

The message was a short one word question. It said simply "Fin?"

"What the hell?!" exclaimed Josh "What do you make of that?"

"The only thing that springs to mind is that 'fin' is French for 'end'. Is someone asking if we've finished something?" Tom wondered aloud.

"Shit" replied Josh "they'd have to know we were doing something, and they'd have to know this number. Since both of those little items are supposed to be a secret, I wonder what the heck is going on!"

Mike joined them, preceded by Liz and followed closely by Linda. They got the gist of what was up from Josh's outburst but Tom showed them the message anyway.

"Who knows this number?" asked Mike coming quickly awake despite the short amount of sleep.

"Just you, Josh, and the select country managers that you gave it to." responded Tom.

"And all those folk are here now and probably still asleep. Besides, that number is not one I know." stated Mike.

Tom was thinking hard. "That word 'fin' is French for 'end' or 'finish' right?" he asked as Mike nodded his confirmation. "But it's also 'Fin' as in a guy I know . . . " he continued slowly.

Josh whistled low and slow. "Do you mean to tell me that your old schoolmate Mr Spook knows everything about this wee project of ours?!!"

"The only thing that makes sense I think" nodded Tom.

Mike thought about it for a bit and then agreed. "It's certainly the most likely explanation."

"What do I go back with then?" Tom asked "Something like 'who r u' or more like 'just Oz 2 go'"

"Why don't you ring him and see?" suggested Linda "He's still your friend as far as we know."

"How about I ring him on my regular cell?" Tom suggested

"Or text him on it" suggested Mike. "I suggest you text him on your regular cell asking if he's awake and see what he replies with."

"Right" said Tom already digging out his cellphone out. "Here we go - 'r u up?' should do for an explore."

They all looked at his phone expectantly. Almost immediately it warbled and Tom was quickly into the reply - 'Yes - Fin or not?' it said.

"Busted" Josh breathed sadly.

"Well, I'm going to tell him the truth and let's see what happens." said Tom.

"Use the phone and number he first used." cautioned Mike. "Leave him some options in case he's being monitored and is playing off the reservation like we are."

"OK" responded Tom already punching the reply into the disposable phone - 'Just Oz, PNG left.'

They all waited anxiously, the tension rising with each second.

After what seemed like half a lifetime but was only about 20 seconds, the phone chirruped again. Tom quickly opened it and read the message out loud:

"Good. Continue. Later."

Josh whistled a long drawn out note of concern.

"What on this effed up planet does that mean?!"

Tom replied very slowly, thinking on his feet "I think it means he set us up all along last Christmas and had us do his dirty work for him!" He looked at Mike for confirmation.

Mike nodded "He's a slippery devil that Fin!" he said "It makes sense. Let's assume the GCSB found a threat or two out there and wanted to do something to stop them but couldn't because the government couldn't afford to take such drastic action."

"What? So he set up a couple of dumb civilians to do it for him? That's a pretty hard line to follow!" exploded Josh.

"Maybe" said Linda quietly, "But if it's hard for you to swallow, perhaps it will be equally hard for everyone else to swallow and so they get away with it."

"But, but . . ." Josh's arguments petered out as he realised the logic of it. He fell silent and thought about it.

"Sneaky old swine!" he finally managed quietly.

Suddenly their thoughts were interrupted

"Hey, guys! Come here - listen to this!" Liz was calling them from the ATC flight info station. She turned up the volume on the Auckland area radio as they headed her way.

"Auckland Approach from KE129. Say again - Divert? Confirm." the voice of the Korean Air pilot came from the speaker.

"KE129 from Auckland Approach. Confirm. Sorry but we have to ask you to divert. New Zealand airspace is closing. You should divert to your primary alternate BNE Brisbane." the Airways controller sounded apologetic but firm.

"What the heck is going on now?" Josh exclaimed but he was cut off by the Korean pilot's angry response.

"Auckland Approach, what do mean divert to Brisbane? This is outrageous!"

"KE129, divert to Brisbane. We have an urgent medical quarantine situation here and are closing our airspace forthwith. Sorry for the inconvenience."

"Auckland Approach, we cannot divert. We have VIP passengers who must arrive Auckland today."

"KE129 divert." the controller stated in his most assertive voice "If you fail to divert you will be intercepted by military fighter aircraft."

Tom, Mike and Josh looked at each other. Surprised was not a strong enough word!

"But the Government disbanded the fighter wing ages ago!" Josh burst out finally.

"I guess they quietly re-activated them" Mike mused. "If they knew about our plan all along, they had plenty of time to do so."

"Shit!" whistled Josh.

"Look!" exclaimed Linda. "It's turning around."

Sure enough, on the ATC feed, they could see the aircraft changing course, turning back towards the Australian coast.

"Jeepers creepers!" burst out Josh, "now what do we do?"

"Well, I think we stick to the plan, but perhaps bring it forward just a tad." Tom said soothingly. "We were due to trigger PNG and the east coast of Australia at 0730 their time being 0930 here, and then Western Australia two hours later. Since there's plenty of life in the cans, I'd suggest we trigger Sydney an hour early and trigger the west coast at the same time."

"I concur" agreed Mike, then added "maybe you should check with Fin?"

"He said 'continue', but I would like to check out this latest development." Tom concurred.

He pushed the 'ring' button on his disposable phone and within just a few seconds it was answered

"Ok to talk?" Tom asked

"Be brief" Fin's voice confirmed

"Military intercept?!" asked Tom incredulously

"A4's on hot standby." confirmed Fin.

"Continue? Oz, all locations & PNG in 2 hrs?"

"Affirm" was Fin's brief response

"Then what?" asked Tom

"Wait." said Fin clicking off.

## **19 June (Tuesday) 0805 hrs NZST**

Tom sat back and stretched his arms above his head. At the map, Josh and Linda started colouring in all of Australia and PNG with their black vivid markers while Liz crossed off their last few lines on the master list. Mike was digesting the various news feeds and watching the Narita and Singapore flights edge closer. The local news had been going berserk as the news of the Korean Air flight's divert started to leak. There was no official announcement but there had been some reports from the correspondents in Australia as the ripples from the unorthodox divert started to pop up.

Before anyone could say anything, Tom's disposable phone warbled announcing another text message. He flipped it open.

"It just says 'maintenant fin?' from guess-who." he advised the others as he sent back "oui".

As he watched the phone, it vibrated in his hand and the message flashed up "Good job. Don't go anywhere."

"He wants us to stay put." Tom told the others.

Mike at the bank of computers suddenly turned up the volume on the Christchurch Approach radio and called their attention to it.

"SQ297 from Christchurch Approach, sorry but we have to advise you to divert. New Zealand airspace is closed. You should divert to your primary alternate Sydney."

"Here we go again" said Mike.

"Christchurch Approach from SQ297, say again - divert to Sydney?" the surprise in the pilot's voice was obvious to all.

"Confirmed SQ297. New Zealand is declaring a medical quarantine emergency and is closing it's borders." confirmed the ATC Controller.

"Well, that's an escalation from the last one!" exclaimed Josh.

"Sure is." commented Tom.

Liz chimed in pointing at the TV "Look at this - Breaking news"

The banner news was scrolling along the bottom of TV1 and simultaneously on TV3 but wasn't yet on CNN. "New Zealand closes borders - cites medical emergency. "

Meanwhile the Singapore Airlines pilot was trying to argue the divert, but again the controller repeated the comment about 'military fighter intercept' and eventually the pilot duly turned around towards Sydney.

"It's all go now!" said Mike "Look at the Flight boards."

He pointed to the screen showing the International Arrivals and Departures. All were flipping over to "Cancelled".

"Way to go Fin" whistled Linda.

"I guess he's a little bit more than just a radio guy these day!" mused Tom aloud.

Liz called their attention back to the TV. "Special Report breaking in guys" she said.

"We interrupt your scheduled viewing to bring you this special report." the reporter was obviously flustered and ill-prepared but doing his best with the hasty notes in front of him and the fresh news coming into his earpiece. He outlined the statement again and cut to a stock shot of the Christchurch Airport and the iconic new ATC Tower while the voice-over outlined the situation with the 2 planes ordered to divert. They had obviously just been given a basic press release that stated just that and they were floundering to dig up anything else that was relevant.

Then the reporter interrupted himself touching his finger to his earpiece "Hold on a minute, we're just getting an update from our field reporter outside the Air Force base at Whenuapai in Auckland. Jess, can you tell us what's happening there?"

"Good morning Mack. Yes, well as you can see behind me, there is unprecedented activity going on this morning. You can see three A4K Skyhawks are parked on the ready stand at the end of the runway and they are obviously prepared for battle. You can see that while the engines are running, they are simultaneously being hot refuelled for an instantaneous departure at maximum fuel, and the ready crew are poised to get them airborne at a moments notice."

"You can see the obvious weapons are the pair of AIM9L 'Sidewinder' missiles on the outer hardpoints and the AGM65 'Maverick' missiles on the inner hard points, but if you look carefully you can also see the red flags streaming from under the forward belly which indicate to me that they are also loaded with ammunition for their 20mm cannons, and the red flag streaming from down the back by the arrestor hook tell me that they are also loaded with either chaff, flares or jammers for countermeasures. The fact that they are also fitted with the centreline fuel tank indicates they are ready for an extended range or duration on patrol. I see the third A4 is configured as a tanker

with the two wing-mounted drop tanks and the centreline 'buddy-store' to refuel them after take-off so they are setting up for extended patrolling. However, the tanker A4 also has two wingtip mounted AIM9L 'Sidewinder' missiles. Also you can see a P3 Orion about to take off. This is not the normal patrol schedule for this aircraft and this reporter believes it is an additional patrol."

"What does this mean Jess?" the studio reporter asked

"Well, given the statement we just received a few minutes ago, I can only conclude that the Air Force is prepared to enforce a New Zealand border closure with deadly force if necessary and the Skyhawks are standing by on a war footing equipped for air to air and air to sea action. The additional Orion patrol may indicate a concern about submarines or simply to maximise sea shipping detection."

"That's extra-ordinary Jess." the studio guy played it up for the folks at home.

"What's more extra-ordinary Mack, is that the Skyhawks you see behind me now were supposed to be languishing un-usable in their hangars as they had been for the decade. It was considered that they were unable to be brought into flying condition ever again, and yet, here they are, operational and armed essentially for war."

"Hold on a minute Jess," interrupted Mack pressing his earpiece more fully into his ear, "we're also getting an unconfirmed report that Skyhawks are also out in force on the flight line at the Ohakea Air Force base and similarly to the scene behind you, 2 Skyhawks are on the ready pad at the end of the runway there similarly armed and with a tanker aircraft currently taxiing into a takeoff position on the runway."

"Well Mack, that makes sense for a more rapid response to support a border closure for the South Island, and confirms that the earlier statement is not just an empty threat."

They went on to speculate about what was happening and what it meant. But no-one knew what the so-called medical emergency quarantine was. None of the reporters seemed to be aware of anything from recent news snippets or happenings that could have caused this much activity.

Now the "Breaking News" banner was featuring on the CNN news channel where the same scenes and speculation was repeated, albeit in a much condensed form - New Zealand was small-fry on the global American-dominated stage.

But this was the day the junior reporter lived for - the big story that had broken suddenly while the "name" reporters were still out of the office! Jess and Mack were suddenly high profile all around the world as the various media picked the story up during the day.

Suddenly the warehouse echoed to the sound of someone knocking loudly on the roll-up doors wicket-gate. They looked at each other and then Josh went slowly to see who it was. Opening the door cautiously a crack, he suddenly frowned, then smiled and stepped back throwing the door open wide. Fin stepped in with his finger to his mouth and a light folding step ladder in his other hand. He walked over to the cross beams in the center of the warehouse space, placed the ladder, climbed up and after a brief bit of fumbling at the join in the exposed rafters, pulled away a small tube and climbed down the ladder. When he was down he put the object on the concrete floor and squashed it with the heel of his boot.

"You guys have been busy little beavers!" he finally said with a grin pocketing the squashed tube.

"You bugged us?!" exclaimed Josh angrily.



"You betcha arse!" responded Fin dryly, "There was too much riding on it not to. But for your peace of mind, we only put this one in the other week."

"What other devices are there then?" asked Mike his military mind leaping to the obvious.

"Well rather surprisingly, there's only one more." Fin answered "Josh, remember when you had that battery of jabs for the various diseases during your BioHaz First Responder medical?"

"Sure" retorted Josh "I was a real pin-cushion! Why? Did you add one of your own little 'extra's' did you?"

"Sorry, yes. There's a tiny GPS tracking chip in your left shoulder. We can take it out whenever you like now."

"What?!!" Josh and Liz burst out together, as Josh's right hand darted to his shoulder.

"Sorry team. We had to know what you guys were up to, but I managed to keep the surveillance to a bare minimum so as not to upset your privacy too much. Let me tell you that took a lot of convincing, but you guys didn't let me down so all is cool now."

Tom who had been simply looking at his friend saying nothing the whole time, spoke up finally.

"Fin," he said quietly "you better explain yourself."

"Sure will" he said, "but first off, I bet you guys haven't eaten at all this morning?"

"Umm, no, I guess we haven't" said Linda looking at Fin strangely.

"Bear with me a second" he said walking back over to the door. He opened it wide and in walked a small procession of people who quickly and silently set up a folding table with 6 chairs, white linen tablecloth, and silver service, quickly followed by plates of steaming bacon, eggs, tomatoes, hash browns, pancakes and toast, while another pair of the team put out and filled up six champagne flutes and added a large jug of juice and more glasses to the table before disappearing back out and closing the door.

"Let's sit down and eat." invited Fin "If you're anything like me, it's been a long night and you're probably in need of a little winding down."

Surprisingly, despite the oddness of the situation, they realised he was right, and they all headed for the table that now took the attention away from the command center that had been the culmination of their whole purpose for the last year and a half.

Fin sat in the centre on one side of the table with Mike on his left and Josh on his right. Liz sat opposite her husband, with Tom next to her opposite Fin and then Linda.

"Fin . . ." began Tom.

"Right," said Fin, "but first things first." He picked up his champagne flute directing it in a salute to each of them in turn around the table. "Here's to a sterling project execution - well done -to Scythe."

A little surprised, and bashful, they all raised their glasses and mumbled "Scythe" in return, before sipping quietly. They all knew enough about wine to recognise the quality and implied cost.

Maybe they wouldn't be going to prison after all !

## Chapter 5 - Surviving the Cataclysm

**19 June (Tuesday) 1335 hrs NZST**

The black Pajero swept quietly along the Wellington foreshore as it left the airport behind it. Liz looking out the tinted windows reflected on the crazy morning. They were heading for the Crisis Management Centre in the basement of the Beehive. According to Fin it was already operating on the current situation and the folks in charge wanted a 'wee chat'.

At breakfast, Fin had told them the story of how his GCSB unit had, from various communications intercepts, identified a number of solid leads to 2012 plots where known extremist parties were making preparations to make sure their interpretations of the doomsday prophecies were fulfilled. They had made several different plans to thwart the plots but had realised that if these were the plots they knew about, there were bound to be plenty of others they didn't know about. He hadn't meant to set them up to do what they did as they hadn't considered that any member of the public would a) have the determination, or b) the knowledge and execution capabilities to do anything. However, when Fin learned that Josh had quit his job and was making preparations to start his BioHaz Services company he paid more attention to the pair of families and through total monitoring of their internet and phone traffic, he had rapidly worked out their intent.

Fin had gone on to tell them that he ran with it solo for quite a while because he still didn't think they could do it and there was no point getting them in serious trouble if nothing came of it, but as it became clear that they had the virus and were cultivating the stockpiles, bringing in thousands of air-freshener cans and involving Mike in setting up a distribution network, he pushed the plan up the chain as far as the Prime Minister's office for the approval to let it play out. The top level approval was necessary to activate the preparedness plan for the border closure enforcement. With the Air Force's fighter wing moth-balled by previous governments, it needed a big effort to take the jets out of moth-balls and ensure they had sufficient pilot and ground crew support to man them. Since they could not do this openly, it was a huge challenge to overcome.

Fin hadn't felt he needed to bug their homes, workplaces and the pub and other hangouts as his superiors had wanted him to, as by tracking all their email, internet and phone traffic, and marrying this up with Josh's every tracked movement, he could keep sufficient track of their plan and progress including the time-line.

When Mike had sent his 'Hermes up. Egress.' text message and Fin's team identified the origin as being Frankfurt airport, without having to know the code word, Fin had known he was on his way out and that D-Day was likely to be imminent in probably 2 or 3 days. Knowing the way Tom thought helped he'd told them. He figured that they would probably want to use the Monday morning rush hour concept for maximum exposure and as they started moving the gear into the BioHaz Services warehouse on the weekend, his confidence increased. His team was on high alert all weekend with the CMC lightly manned all day Monday. He'd actually expected the attack to start on the Tuesday morning, but when the bug activated on Monday and the first cellphone call occurred, the skeleton team had already been supplemented by the rest of the team and they were tracing the destinations in real time as each call went out. They hadn't been able to confirm the exact locations of each device due to the multiple 'reflections' of the cloned sim cards, but they certainly got the regional location due to the phones continual 'here I am' polling of the phone network in order to allow the call to be connected.

Fin had told them that the team wanted to pull them in for a debriefing to elaborate on the little that they didn't know. After the breakfast they had

transferred their files onto memory sticks, collected the call logs and map then shut everything down and tidied up. Fin had then taken them in his 'anonymous' black Pajero to the virtual 'back door' of the airport via the Operation Deep Freeze base which supported the NZ and USA detachments in Antarctica, and there they boarded the waiting unmarked plain white Cessna Mustang jet. They had taken off smoothly and enjoyed the smooth ride of an executive jet while watching the updates on TV and internet feeds that were a feature of this rather specially equipped aircraft.

The reporters were still none the wiser and, in the absence of any official statement, were conjecturing like crazy. By now there was plenty for them to talk about and both TV1 and TV3 had established a continual coverage approach, abandoning their regular Tuesday line-up of soaps and kids programs. They recapped a lot. There were stories of several planes being ordered back and by now there was comment and feedback from the reporters in Australia and elsewhere where the affected planes had diverted or returned to. Pictures of angry and confused passengers flashed on the screen as each person's opinion was flashed to the world.

The Skyhawks were now no longer on stand-by and were up flying orbits above the northern tip of Cape Reinga and also off the west coast. The patrolling pairs were supported by regular visits from a tanker A4 and would be replaced on station by another pair of similarly armed jets as the pilots returned for a rest.

The P3 Orions were doing a similar job hunting subs and ships. Although there was only a handful of P3's compared to the A4's, they could stay on station longer due to a greater endurance and the luxury of room to carry replacement flight crew rather than having to return to base. Despite the knowledge that any ship approaching the NZ coast today, could not have been infected, a blanket shutdown was being applied - primarily for appearances sake.

The ships were a little harder to convince to divert. With the airplanes, as Fin told them, they had waited as long as possible for the deployment to complete, but had still needed to warn them off while they were still several hours away or else they would have tended to continue to land rather than divert in which case we would have been forced to shoot them down. But the range of marine radios and the slower speed meant that there several ships that had to be warned off quite close to land where the temptation to say "sod you!" must have been extreme. They had actually had to send in the Skyhawks on two separate occasions to overfly them and in one of the cases, to fire shots across the bow of the ship before they had got the message. The Navy was now pacing these ships with a watchful eye on them all.

But still, no-one knew why. All they had been told was the 'medical emergency quarantine' line and that a full statement would be made on the 6 o'clock news.

Suddenly, as they were swinging into the Beehive's underground car-park, Liz had a thought.

"Fin, we're not going to be on the 6 o'clock news are we?"

Fin laughed loudly "I very much doubt that!" he said "As far as anyone knows 'officially' you don't exist, and even if you did they can never acknowledge it."

"Phew" sighed Linda "That's a relief! I wouldn't want Danielle and Liz's boys getting a hard time at school because of this."

"And what would the kids've done if you'd gone to jail for doing this?" Fin asked quietly, stumping them with a silence that lasted for the rest of their spiral down the different levels into the sub-basement.

They stopped in front of a door that had armed police at it. This was a novelty for all of them as normally they only saw guns in police hands on the rare armed offender squad callouts, and reinforced the reality of the situation for them. Fin showed his credentials and signed them all in. They were expertly frisked before being issued large pin-on "Visitor" badges, however as they walked down the tunnel, another armed guard trailed them all the way to their destination - another armed door deep in the bowels of the building. The National Crisis Management Centre.

Again Fin went through the process of clearing them through and they were logged in. As they stepped through the door they entered a kind of 'airlock room' where you could see, but not hear, the activity going on inside. This was where any tour parties stopped, but of course Fin led them straight inside.

The room was a buzz of quiet, ordered purpose. There were various banks of monitors showing everything from world and detailed maps, TV news feeds, website feeds and any other image they desired to be displayed. Around the edge of the room under the monitor banks was a continuous run of manned workstations with computer and monitor screens, papers, radios and phones. Communications were a big part of the CMC and everyone wore a wireless blue-tooth headset that was personalised to the wearer and could be connected to any audio channel desired through a selector keypad on the desk. In the centre of the room was a boardroom-like meeting table, again featuring the audio keypad.

As they entered the room a few people looked up and when they recognised Fin and his 'guests', they nudged their buddies who hadn't bothered to look up. In short order the room fell silent.

"This is Tom, Linda, Josh, Liz and Mike" he introduced them one by one by touch as everyone nodded before they all went right back to work.

As Fin pointed them to chairs at the meeting table, one of the team detached himself from his colleagues and workstation chair and headed towards them, while simultaneously from outside the room, a technician approached them with a blue-tooth headset each. Josh recognised the team member approaching as the Anthrola research professor Jim Hawthorn. He warmly greeted him and introduced him to the others.

"Quite a show you've cooked up for us Josh" said Jim with a wry smile on his face. "I've got to tell you I have mixed feelings about seeing this little beastie out in the wild!"

"I bet!" agreed Josh "Let me guess - excitement to see the real world effects of all your lab work, but a touch of fear and concern about what it means? Don't worry, we are the same."

As the technician, showed them how to synch their headset to whichever keypad they were at and the 'phonebook' of channels available to them, Fin had already synched in and called in their arrival. About 5 minutes later, a number of 'suits' arrived and joined them at the table, donning and synching their headsets as they sat down. Fin didn't bother to introduce them but did identify Josh, Tom, Mike, Liz and Linda to them.

The debriefing went on for most of the rest of the afternoon. As they told their story with Tom as the principal story-teller, the others took notes, asked questions, and filled in pertinent gaps from their side that they thought the team of five were deemed fit to know. While they talked, the work of controlling a border shutdown and global crisis monitoring continued around them. They became aware that what they could see in the CMC was only the tip of the iceberg and that behind each workstation was a team of analysts and co-ordinators breaking down commands into tactical execution 'packets' and chunking up sit-reps for analysis. The military's 3C's - Communications, Command and Control, were hard at work here.

Finally the CMC team seemed satisfied that they knew all there was to know and got up to go. The leader of the group motioned Tom to walk out with him and said a few words to him in the 'airlock' before trooping off.

"Time to go" said Fin and they all stood up to follow the suits out, passing their headsets to the technician waiting at the door.

However, Fin did not head back down the tunnel towards the carpark, instead turning the other direction and taking them deeper into the subterranean monster. After a series of confusing twists and turns, Fin opened a door and led them in to a strange looking room.

It featured a set of solid double doors that appeared to be edged with copper strips. The room was quite bare except for a small meeting room type table and chairs. Tom noticed that his cellphone reception, which was showing as exceedingly dodgy in the underground environment, suddenly went completely dead.

"Don't worry guys, it's not a high security prison cell!" joked Fin, "This is a SCIF - **Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility**. Basically a secret room with a built in 'cone of silence'."

"What happens in here Fin? Clandestine beatings and special wash-boarding interviews?" Mike asked semi-seriously.

"I'd be so lucky!" joked Fin. "No, no, nothing like that, just exchanges of highly sensitive information, or meetings that never happened . . ."

Before anyone could say anything more, they heard the two doors open and a guy with close cropped hair and a curly-cord-ear-piece running down the side and back of his neck and the obvious appearance of a bodyguard, poked his head in, looked around and then with a curt nod at Fin, stepped back to let his principal in closing the doors behind him as he entered. He was someone they all knew immediately.

"Well guys and girls, what am I to do about you?" he asked grimly as he strode towards them. It was John Key, the Prime Minister, and he was without his usual tag-along crew.

All of a sudden, he reached out to shake their hands and without Fin having to introduce them, greeted each of them by name. He obviously knew all about them from a photo assisted briefing at least.

"Sit down" he invited pointing at the table as he slid into one of the seats himself.

"Tell me what it feels like to launch a war on the rest of the world?" he added with a dead-pan serious tone to his voice. This was not the jovial John Key they were used to seeing.

Linda was the first "Well sir, I'm not sure about the others, but right about now I'm feeling pretty tired - not just lack of sleep tired. And to be fair, quite a lot of concern about a whole bunch of things but mainly, did it work right, will they suffer lots, what's going to happen now, and what if it didn't work and they all come looking for us, and by default you and the rest of the country too. Plus I guess, with all this attention, I'm also feeling a small touch of pride that a couple of regular married couples could do all this by themselves. But that thought goes away pretty quick when I remember what's going to happen to the billions of people out there."

The others didn't add anything to that - she had captured it pretty well!

He looked at them for a long time and then he sighed and admitted "I couldn't have ordered what you've done, and I doubt that any other of the world's

leaders could have done so either, but rest assured we couldn't think of any other way to make the world safe either. You have my sincere thanks."

They were taken aback by his candid admission, but he hadn't finished.

"When this project was brought to my attention, I was right in the middle of a re-election campaign. Compared to the usual kind of decisions I get to make, this one sure took the cake! I'm not sure if you've considered my position - if I'm thinking of sending NZ troops to war, the number of people involved is very limited, but think of all the media attention and divided opinion that topic brings. Then think about the Kyoto protocol and what stance we're going to take on Global Warming initiatives and how hotly people debate that issue. Now imagine someone asking me to sit back and do nothing while some of his nationals go about wiping out the majority of the human species. I was being asked to sanction global terrorism. That, was a very worrying period for me! And I am very glad that we won the election and I continued on as PM because that briefing to an incoming replacement was not a conversation I was looking forward to."

"So, there you go. We ultimately decided to back your little plan and run interference for you as required. Fin, how much interference did we run in the end?"

"Other than the border control stuff we're doing now, you do not want to know the answer to that question Sir." Fin responded briskly.

Mr Key looked at Fin as if he was a lovable but bad dog that was as likely to bite his hand off as much as lick it. "Hmmm" was all he said, and then after another pause, he stood up.

"Well, I would love to chat about the intricacies of your little scheme, but I have to go and prepare to tell the world why we closed our borders. Needless to say this conversation never happened, but it was very nice not meeting you." finally, there was that trademark John Key grin!

## ***22 December (Saturday) 0630 NZDT = 1130 hrs 21 December Mayan time***

Their little group had gathered up in the Sugarloaf hill carpark looking out over Christchurch and the majestic Southern Alps behind the city. Behind them, the sun was already up and slowly warming the sleepy city, having dawned three quarters of an hour previously and climbed sufficiently to clear the Port Hills which blocked a straight-to-the-horizon view.

There wasn't a lot of movement at that time of the morning normally but today was a little different, since it was the predicted date for the 2012 'end of days'. The Mayan calendar was said to end on December 21<sup>st</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> depending on which source you believed, however that was the date in Central America. Since New Zealand was one day ahead, the Mayan calendar ended on the 22<sup>nd</sup> (or 24<sup>th</sup>) and if you assumed the timing to be related to astronomical events, then presumably 1200 high noon in Central American Mayan country, corresponded to 0700 hrs in NZ.

Therefore on this potentially auspicious day, they had all come up to watch the sunrise and see what happened at 0700. Just like they'd done for both the 1999/2000 Y2K, and the 2000/2001 Millenium New Year's eve 'end of the world' predictions.

Not that they believed the predictions! But it was a good excuse to do something out of the ordinary and to 'tell the kids' in years to come!

They were mostly silent, just looking at the scenery, each locked in their own thoughts. The grown-ups were thinking back over the last 6 months and the 'new age' they now lived in, while the kids had moved past the scenery and the adults conversations and were by now thinking about what they were going to get for Christmas in a few days time!

The last half year though had certainly given them plenty of things to reflect upon to work out what new directions were required. With the world's population reduced from almost 7 billion to about 5 million, being NZ, the Pacific and other islands, and the handful of survivors in each place, dramatic changes and adjustments were needed. But the NZ government had a head start on what was needed and had made a lot of plans. Economists had considered the impact to the businesses, while the more practical minded planners were concerned with making sure the right resources were available. For some time that was going to be relatively straight-forward as most of what was needed was lying around in deserted factories, stores and warehouses around the world. The companies whose business relied on the export trade now refocussed their purpose, with many stepping into various "scavenger" enterprises, raiding the other countries' resources and returning them to where they were needed.

The 'clean-up' teams had gone out first. The biologists had decided that the Anthrola virus would have 'burned itself out' within a week after the last death. So in early July the first teams had gone in. Australia was the first target and the teams, fully kitted up in BioHaz suits, had flown in to secure the key airports and seaports, then expanding out from there to clear the city surrounding it. The 'cleanup' process in the residential areas was to establish a clear fire break all around it then burn it to the ground. It was faster than a house to house clean up and the reality was if they saved the houses then someone would need to maintain them or else they'd fall down eventually anyway. With no need for them, the easiest thing was to burn them to the ground - with bodies in-situ. The remaining rubble was then bulldozed into holes and depressions.

The same process was repeated for the industrial and commercial areas with exceptions. Selected factories, plants and other facilities were saved where they were clearly useful for future use. Predominantly, this involved selecting a cluster of buildings with warehouses and key factories /facilities existed. The 'scavenger' teams worked with them in phase identifying the useful from the non-useful. All finished products were collected from the surrounding shops and factories and relocated to the cluster warehouses for storage. The rest of the buildings were then torched.

Other teams were despatched to "shut-down" the now abandoned countries. The first target was to shut down the all the plants spewing noxious gasses into the air, the unnecessary nuclear reactors and other power plants and the like that hadn't already shut-down due to the lack of people. Each facility was left secure such that they could be reactivated if and when they needed them. The 'shut-down' teams did not concern themselves with clean-up, and so they could quickly move through a country and ensure no unplanned man-made activity was occurring.

Some of the 'scavenger' teams accompanied the shut-down teams further afield than Australia, commandeering container ships and cargo planes as required to transport everything back to NZ, as well as several key resource installations that would be required long term - primarily this related to fuel.

As the various teams went through the countries, they sometimes came across pockets of survivors who had missed exposure to the virus, and also the mass panic and chaos that was inflicted in it's wake. Most of these people were brought back to New Zealand as the majority concentration point for the resource gathering, however some groups chose to remain where they were, and

communication channels and regular reporting and assistance methods were put in place.

Somewhere down the track the politics of it all would emerge as the outposts and 'scavenger teams' competed for the resources and would want to do their own thing, but for now, everyone was glad of the loose organisation the NZ Government team was providing, and were just focussed on doing what needed doing to survive.

It was surely a "brave new world" out there with plenty to do.

Suddenly, their thoughts were interrupted.

"Look Dad!" Josh's 8 year old son Max excitedly pointed up to their right where a blue streak was racing across the pink and orange tinted sky.

"Meteor!" responded Josh "Quick mate, make a wish!"

Within the space of about 10 seconds it was gone, tracking from the north west to the south east, but the other-worldly electric-blue and white ball had pepped them all up from their pensive mood.

A few seconds later Danielle called "Look mum - another one."

Sure enough, this time the colours were more fiery - orange and reds. Tom wondered if this one was digging lower into the atmosphere whereas the previous one might've just glanced off the outside.

"Oh wow Dad!" yelled Abe, Josh's youngest son, "lots of them now!"

Sure enough the north-western part of the sky started filling up with orange dot after orange dot, all zipping in the same arc towards the south east.

"A whole meteor shower." Josh crouched down to Abe's height giving him a sideways hug as they watched the show, "Wow, you don't get to see that very often!"

They watched in amazement as meteor after meteor flashed by in a show that was better than any Guyfawks display, and all the better for being in the daylight. But all of a sudden they realised that the meteors were either getting bigger, or closer as the dots were now appearing as larger balls, and every once in a while, they could hear a sonic clap from one as it went racing past.

Now the number and pace of the fiery trails seemed to pick up as well and the whole sky seemed to be full of the racing, blazing space debris. It was a spectacular, once in a lifetime, light and sound show.

It was Linda that saw it first and she gasped in alarm, pointing, just as the others saw it as well.

In behind the smaller dots and balls of fire they could make out a huge, raging, glow in the northern sky. As the glow grew and blossomed, it brightened up the whole sky until there was no hint of blue in the north, but a fiery angry red fading to orange in the space it was heading towards. It came rushing along the same trajectory as the other meteors, but they could see this was no small piece of space junk destined to fall to the ground somewhere as a small chunk of slagged rock - no, this must be one giant-sucker of a full blown asteroid. It quickly filled the sky and now they could hear it's angry roar as it wrenched and rent the atmosphere out of it's way.

The families clutched each other in fear and wonder.

Now Tom could see that under and in front of the giant intruder was a huge white cloud. He didn't know it, but this was a trail of superheated steam and vapour where the surface of the sea was flash boiled from the radiated heat



of this monster's entry to the atmosphere. Despite the many thousands of feet altitude it was at, the heat radiating from the atmospheric entry friction from such a massive object was able to reach down and affect the sea and ground it passed over. As the megalithic monster flashed over the lower part of the South Island, the forests leaped into flame and the last remaining snow on the Southern Alps was instantly melted and vaporised.

The sudden thunderclap as the shockwave reached them pummelled them to the ground while the radiated heat burnt them with something more than a severe sunburn.

Mike was thinking to himself "We are so dead!"

It was indeed the 'Armageddon Asteroid' that had been hinted at and perhaps foreseen by Nostradamus and the Mayan's so long ago. Some of the Armageddon predictions had indicated an 800 meter to 1 kilometer long asteroid with an impact point near the Filchner-Ronne ice shelf of Antarctica at a longitude almost in line with the Mayan's Central America, and indeed it looked like a feasible destination for this stellar monster.

Even before it struck, in a couple of seconds time, the pressure wave would be wreaking it's havoc on the ice shelf and the sea. The tidal wave from the asteroid impact itself would be beyond imagination, but add to it the added impetus from the mass of ice that would be knocked off the polar plateau and the deluge would be unimaginable. The theorised prediction was that ultimately the impact would crack the ice shelf itself resulting in total structural collapse within a few months. The world's oceans would subsequently be raised by 70 meters changing the face of world all over again.

In addition to the huge wave, the impact would throw up a huge amount of matter into the atmosphere that would create a dust cloud that would permanently change the weather patterns and global temperature. Another ice-age was imminent.

Massive earthquakes rippling out from the impact epicentre would trigger volcanic eruptions all around the globe. The west coast of the Americas immediately 'above' the impact point formed one side of the Pacific Ring of Fire. The massive jolt along that fault line from the impact would be like a hammer hitting a clay pot and would surely unseat the continental plates and who knew what the outcome would be?

But they weren't going to be about to see any of this cataclysmic sequence of events. The massive wall of foaming, steaming wave that was less than a minute away, was going to wash them off the face of the earth.

Their efforts had all been for nothing . . .

## Appendix

### Possible Code Words

Word	Origin	Applied to
Crassus	Roman General who defeated Spartacus and who revived the use of "decimation" as a form of punishment executing every 10 <sup>th</sup> soldier of a mutinous or cowardly unit.	Not used
Scythe Atteas	Scythian archers infected their arrows by dipping them in decomposing bodies or in blood mixed with manure as far back as 400 BC. Atteas was their king in 400BC	Project or process of infecting ?
Party-day		'D-day'
Vesper	The vesper mouse is the method by which BHF virus is spread.	Deployment method?
Shit or crap	The Scythian archers again plus it can be easily disguised in casual conversation as in "he was giving me shit"	The virus generally
artichoke	Green spiky not too commonly used vegetable	The Anthrola virus
Hermes	Messenger of the greek gods	Delivery of the parts
Batcave	Batman's secret hideout, and any place where clusters of bats congregate.	The lab at the Tai Tapu farm
soup	Often used to refer to a very liquid mixture of anything.	Aerosol liquid

## Authors Footnote

Dear Reader,

I hope you have enjoyed this work of fiction, however I also hope that it has not made you despondent about the coming days. No-one knows for sure what, if anything, will happen in 2012 despite the plethora of books, movies, websites and opinions "out there" about this.

I think it is worth noting that while some very well educated and experienced persons believe that the Mayan calendar ending is a sign of bad things to come, a larger majority seem to believe that at worst, nothing untoward will happen and many, in fact, including some of the leading experts on the Mayan culture, believe it will be a turning point for the better. It is worth keeping in mind that in our modern world, in fact our calendars end each, and every, year!

And if, after reading this story, you are worried about someone (or some ones) trying to fulfil the prophecy and make sure something bad happens on Dec 21 2012, I can tell you that there are some "holes" and stretching of the truth in my story for good reasons - it would take some incredibly well motivated and exceedingly well financed people to be able to get anywhere near pulling off an act such as forms the theme of this story. Yes, it is feasible that such a well motivated and financed group could obtain chemical and/or biological weapons - it has been done as has been demonstrated by groups like the Aum Shinrikyo cult (now called Aleph) who released Sarin in the Tokyo subway system, but this group (as just one example), despite having a large group of doctors and scientists and over a thousand members, failed to produce and weaponise other biological agents to do what they really wanted to do.

Also, the main theme of this story is to deploy a biological agent in such a way as to destroy ALL human life, and this goal is, I believe, next to impossible. Even to destroy all life within one continent would be incredibly difficult - even for the largest military organisations with their "legal" stockpiles and capabilities to control many thousands of people across the continent or world as desired. A pair of "ordinary" friends and their wives, are not the odds on favourites to win any bet for destroying the world!

So, dear reader, please calm your mind if it is troubled, and take my story as the flight of whimsy that is intended to be.

Thank-you and enjoy!

George McNeur

Christchurch, NZ

January 2011

Also by this author

## The Hand of God

A hint of Sci-Fi and religious philosophy lie behind this story of modern Hi-Tech business interrupted by a terrorist bomb...

Jim is about to find out that life isn't always fair during a regular business trip to Mumbai, but can he and his friends all survive the experience?

Preview The Hand of God

### Chapter 4

As he always did while running, Jim replayed the high points from the latest problem or the previous day through his mind, analysing, problem solving and prioritising. He always thought he did some of his best thinking while running - there was plenty of time to run the various "what-if" scenarios through his mind so that by the time he finished, he usually had a pretty well thought out solution or line of attack to follow.

He was 20 minutes into his pre-breakfast run and decided it was time to turn around and head back. He wanted to leave a safety margin for the unfamiliar locale. It was his first run in India. Part of his ritual - eat too much in Business Class and the airport lounge, so go for a run before the day's business started. It wasn't just for the exercise, it would also allow him to experience a little more of the local sights, sounds and smells than he'd otherwise be exposed to as well as trying to beat off the effect of the excess food & drink.

In a new place, depending on the street density and lay of the land, he usually either went "out and back" which was a compromise between playing it safe on the 'getting-lost-in-strange-country' front, but not so great on the 'maximising-new-scenery' front since the "back" view was the same as the "out" view, but it was safer than the alternative "round-about" method where he tried to run a circuit with the hotel at the centre. Unless there was a good set of landmarks in relation to the hotel, the "out and back" method usually won out, although one time in Tokyo, he'd gone on a nominally "out and back" run from the hotel in Shinagawa towards the Tokyo Tower and then coming back via different streets. He almost came unstuck but the Japanese are a very helpful race and he only had to ask one person for directions before he was back on track. Since that run however, he now took with him a small "bum-bag" with his cellphone, some cash and a map if possible or at least directions for a taxi driver to get him back to the hotel.

Today he was going slower than usual. India was just packed full of people! So concentrating hard, he turned around and headed back exactly the same way he'd come.

He was thinking about yesterday's meeting - the first one with the customer. Tim had picked up a few more salient details about the configuration they

were going to be using it in and the end job it was going to do and was changing the list of features as a result. They confirmed they had desperate need and Jim was now figuring out how they could fit the prototype schedule around their needs. There was some tie in with the PSU in this regard so today he was going to see his two most promising suppliers.

A couple of blocks away from the hotel he came to a stop. The way ahead was blocked by a seeming riot of people. There was a blockage in the road - it looked like there had been an accident but who knew for sure - it could have been the normal street bustle for all he knew.

The guy with the donkey cart seemed to be the guilty party, pushing and pulling at the poor beast's lead rope to get the cart moving again, but it seemed to Jim that the wheel on the cart had seized hence why the donkey was having a problem getting the cart moving again. Jim wondered whether he should divert off his safe path around the obstruction, or wait for it to clear. Being the calculated risk taker, and hater of inaction that he was, he decided to take a detour - new sights after all.

Half an hour and a few more detours than he had expected later, he was finally back on track and one block away from the hotel - well and truly later than he'd planned.

In his bum bag, he heard and felt his cellphone ring. He unzipped the bag and flipped the phone open. It was Tim.

"Hey sleeping beauty" Jim answered "I'm about half a block away - damn Indian traffic and confusing civic architecture is slowing me down."

"Still far too keen for my liking Jim-san" replied Tim "I've just about finished breakfast and was missing my travel buddy."

"Yeah right!" retorted Jim "How's life back home? What is it - jut after lunch there?"

"Yeah, about 2pm. Helen said cooler than here - surprise, surprise! She said..."

there was a pause

"hang on, . . . oh shit! . . ."

Tim's voice broke off in a howl of static. At the same time Jim was knocked off his feet by a ferocious blast of light and sound as a column of dust and debris rocketed out from the direction of the hotel.

Picking himself up, Jim pocketed the cellphone and started running faster and faster towards the hotel, dreading, but knowing deep down with a sinking certainty what he was going to find.

continued . . .