

VIRAD

by

Paul Kirby

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For reference material on any facts stated, or links to references and much more information about control programs past and present.
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Foreword

In the years 1347-1350 perhaps twenty five million people died in Europe from bubonic plague. It's possible that the use of the plague as a weapon by Chinese armies dumping victims in besieged towns greatly assisted it's spread world wide.

In the 1914-1918 war many new things were tried as weapons by all sides. Gasses were difficult to control, so not very successful. Biological agents are even harder to control, there is no public record of their use. It may well be coincidence that the greatest influenza epidemic the world has ever seen appeared during the last months of the war. Whether it had any effect on the outcome is unknown. Deaths from the disease were many times that of war casualties, mostly among healthy working age people, including soldiers. A strain of influenza that affected mostly fit adults, not the very old or very young?

Combatants in the second world war refrained from mass use of chemical weapons, but the plague was used again, this time by the Japanese against the Chinese, even developing a plague bomb.

The war in Vietnam saw the use of countless chemical agents.

In 1981 aids came on the scene. To many at first it seemed a righteous disease, only affecting homosexuals, but they would soon learn better. It has already probably killed more than bubonic plague, and there is no end in sight. Where it came from is very much open to question. Monkeys are currently the most popular culprits according to some scientists, but many suspect a more sinister source.

Population control and mind control programs are in widespread use in the western countries. Some like Mkultra have been exposed, but numerous others continue covertly. Similar programs existed in the old Soviet Union and continue in Russia, China, Korea etc. They have not gone away, and as technology advances they become more and more practical and effective. Who actually controls these programs is shrouded in mist. Who can now be affected is less uncertain, everyone.

This book is dedicated to all the victims of all the wars of freedom who's sacrifices will be for nothing if we allow a small minority to take over all our lives for their own satisfaction.

VIRAD

Chapter 1

Mid day, the clock would strike in a few seconds, what would the man do? Sean stood transfixed, watching the man as he stared unblinkingly at the church clock. Sean's stomach felt like it was constricted to the size of an orange, with fear, anticipation or the complete frustration of helplessness he didn't know. Someone was about to die and Sean could do nothing but watch.

He managed a quick glance around but there was no one else in sight. The church; a little run down nowadays, dominated this short street just off the town centre. Two old pubs faced the church, looking somehow defiant, but completely overshadowed by the dirty stone tower. The man stood in the large gap between the pubs, an entrance to something now disused, his head thrown back, face skyward in a very unnatural pose.

The man's stance is what made it so obvious, even to Sean who so far hadn't witnessed anyone 'go off'. He'd managed to avoid that by not going out unless absolutely essential, and by going to work in the car every day despite the fact he no longer had clients and it was only a five minute walk from home.

Today he'd had to walk home, his car was blocked in. He'd lost the insulation it gave him, lost his security. He could still have turned away and run home when he saw the man, but he had a strong enough reason to hold him here and watch something he'd never wanted to see. He suspected he had the virus. He was looking at his own future.

He hadn't been able to concentrate on work at all, but had checked the time every few minutes. Knowing the time was a craving, completely irresistible, and never satisfied.

It had been a very bad morning at work. He had a large wall clock in

his office. He faced it when at his desk, stupid really leaving that there, but not having it would make him feel worse. He constantly looked at it, checking his feelings when doing so. Trying to ascertain whether it's influence on him changed. Today it had, it had become much more than a clock. He watched the minute hand sweep round each hour, his heart raced, stomach screwed up almost making him sick as the hand approached twelve. Then he'd stiffen, sweating, almost in panic as the last seconds ticked away. He'd hold his breath unconsciously in anticipation, his eyes focused on the end of the pointer. As it reached the vertical he cringed, then saw it pass. The release of tension as the hand moved away was almost overpowering. It hadn't happened, he was still alive, he'd another hour to live.

He'd managed to hold on part of the morning, but didn't get any work at all done. His session at eleven o'clock had been particularly bad, and he'd decided to go home. Sat in his office staring at the clock would drive him insane. He had nothing to distract him, so thought about nothing but the time. He was completely paralysed by this hourly cycle, which he felt a great waste. He had things to do while he was still alive, it hadn't taken him yet so he couldn't give in till it did.

He didn't know when his own symptoms had started. As things were it was difficult to recognise. Everyone took clocks seriously, and tended to give a great deal of thought to them, often looking at them for no reason other than see if their perception of the clock changed. A powerful curiosity drove people to do this, and distinguishing between that and compulsion wasn't easy. At least not till the clock took over your life. By then you were well into the disease, which only ran three days from beginning to end. That was why it was important to know when it began.

Sean's best guess at his own case was that it started yesterday. He'd only really become obsessed in the office this morning, but he had very carefully noted the time of each task the day before. In hindsight that seemed significant. This meant he had about a day and a half to sort out everything, get his affairs in order. After his near panic at eleven o'clock he'd decided to close his studio and set off home. That was the time at which he was finally convinced he really had it.

After tidying up and shutting everything down, he'd carefully locked up. He wasn't expecting ever to open it again. A car blocked the yard entrance, so he locked his car and left it. He set off almost running, very anxious to get back home to his family, only to come across this scene of the man stood staring at the clock. He couldn't pass by despite his urgency, he had to stop and watch, had to see it for himself.

As the gong went the man stiffened, as though he'd had an electric shock. Sean jumped slightly and sucked in air, holding it as the second gong peeled out. The man didn't react to the second one, and Sean relaxed a little. Then the third chime and fourth, but no response at all from the man. He didn't move a single muscle, as the rest of the chimes slowly peeled out over the virtually deserted street. He just continued staring at the church clock.

Sean waited a few minutes after the chimes had finished and then

began to slowly walk towards the man. He wasn't quite sure what he was going to do or say. He'd look a fool if the man was just watching the clock out of curiosity or something. After only a few steps Sean noticed several others also headed that way. They must also have been watching him, but not obviously. These others worried Sean, because he thought the man must be all right. He was still standing looking at the clock, so why were the others heading towards him.

The first to reach the man, just before Sean, was a young woman. She was in her twenties he guessed, quite pretty, with light hair and skin. She was about the same age as the man but totally different in that he was dark skinned with black hair. It seemed unlikely they were genetically related, however she grabbed his arm as though she were familiar with him. Maybe wife or girlfriend. She turned him towards her and then stepped back in shock. She stood staring at the man as though he were a clock and it was her time.

Sean picked up the pace, and quickly approached the couple. The woman had tears in her shocked eyes, and as Sean turned his eyes to the man he stopped in his tracks, only a few feet away. The man's eyes were glazed, staring at nothing, with nothing behind them to stare with. He was a cabbage, complete vegetable. His brain had completely fried itself.

Sean almost threw up, his stomach convulsing but fortunately empty. He hadn't really experienced his own hourly torture, which would have been surprising had he been able to think about it, but he'd been so engrossed in watching. This was far worse. This was real, a man had just died in front of his eyes. He hadn't stopped breathing, just ceased to exist as a person. He was just a collection of living cells which no longer had any purpose, but would continue to live until starvation or thirst killed them.

"Nothing you can do for him, just go home," ordered a man in a suit as he came up and got hold of the victim. "We'll take care of him. Go on, all of you, go home. The shows over."

The woman openly cried and lowered her head. She didn't move, just stood crying. The man in the suit spoke quietly to her. "It's over now, he's moved on. Go home and take care of the living, I'll look after him."

She lifted her eyes, 'why!' written all over her face, but no one had any answers, all stood silent. After a minute she slowly turned her back on the victim and moved off, back bent like a beaten old woman. She'd aged thirty years in a few minutes, and the effect on Sean was devastating. He'd been thinking about himself, or other victims, but it was far worse for those left behind. Those who saw their loved ones turn into vegetables. They still looked the same but weren't there any more. Humans weren't built to handle this kind of dilemma.

Sean turned with the rest to leave, totally shattered. He needed to get away from here as quickly as possible, back home, back to reality and his family, back to the safety of his house.

"Sean give me a hand to get him off the street."

The words stunned him, and he hesitated. He needed to leave, get away from this nightmare, but he felt trapped. He couldn't refuse a request for

help.

He didn't recognise the man in the suit, possibly a policeman. They didn't wear uniforms any more, the job was informal now. Crime had dropped to nothing, primarily from lack of villains or victims. A burglar would be hard pressed to find an occupied house, and a murderer even harder pressed to find someone not already dead or dying.

He gingerly moved to get the man's free arm, fearing to touch him. His hands felt repelled and needed strong conscious effort to grip the man firmly enough to guide him.

They led and half carried the man to the nearby church. There he was parked among several dozen more standing, sitting or lying silently waiting for death, and more than a few already dead.

"Is somebody burying these?" asked Sean, indicating a dead woman. He was even more shocked by the sight in the Church than by the man's state.

"Undertaker is stood over there, I'm the only collection officer still working, none of the burial teams are. They're all in here or already buried or burnt. I'm only doing this now because I've nothing else to do. I won't be able to collect half today's victims. What's going to happen to all these I don't know. I'm just putting them in here to get them off the street. Do you still have family?"

"Yes, wife and two children." A pain ran through him as he said that. He hoped he still had a family, but you could never be sure these days. An overwhelming need to get home came over him. The policeman saw his expression change.

"Thanks for the help but you'd better get home, take care of your own family. I'll think of something to do with all these, get someone else with no one left to help me."

Sean felt guilty leaving, but he had his own problems. He had a wife and two children to think of and he needed to get to them as quickly as possible. He ran from the church and sprinted through town.

That hadn't been much of a show outside the church, but it had stunned Sean to the core. Seeing those in the church had devastated him. He found himself shaking as he rushed up the street towards his own door. Life was like a bad dream. He'd got it and might not have much longer before he went off. Up till now the consequences had seemed abstract, something unreal that happened to unreal people in newspapers. Stories someone made up to scare everyone. But now it had become real with a vengeance.

Like everyone else he'd long ago accepted that sooner or later he'd go off. He had to believe it because so many did every day, but it was like death, everyone accepted that they would die, but not yet. Trouble was the curve this disease was making was heading for vertical. In actual numbers it had already passed its peak simply because most people were already dead, but percentage wise was still climbing.

And now he'd got it. He was young, fit, and would be dead or worse in a few days. Seeing the man in the square had somehow made it real. Seeing the woman go to him brought home the full consequences. It wasn't just Sean

dying, which was bad enough, but his family would have to see, and then keep going without him. He couldn't look after them any more. He glanced at his watch, 12:41, His stomach tightened. Would his time be one o'clock. He raced for the door.

He rushed through his front door slamming it behind him, as though that shut out the disease. He stood with his back to the door for a while to collect himself. He had to tell the family, prepare them. There were things to do, get the kids away, and Tanya. Make arrangements for himself.

Most people tried to commit suicide when they went off, but they often killed or injured others. They had no control, no one was safe near them. He couldn't risk that. He had to make them safe then go somewhere where he wouldn't cause them problems.

His wife walked into the room and stopped a few feet away. She looked as though she were in shock. She could somehow see it in him he thought. Of course, she must have known from the start. They said the last person to see was the victim, that those close to them often saw it first. Tanya had kept it to herself to let him have what peace he could. This made things a lot easier. As usual Tanya had taken most of the burden from him.

"Where are the kids?" he asked. They had to be the first priority. They weren't old enough to fully understand death. They'd have to work out exactly what to tell them. He cringed at the thought of their reaction.

"I've sent them to dad's on the train," she said, her voice toneless.

Sean's heart was almost wrenched out, he wouldn't be able to say goodbye to them, would never see them again. She'd done the right thing though, except she should probably have gone with them and left him a note. Of course she'd never leave him that way, but she had to go before he went off. He didn't want her to see him turn into a mindless vegetable. It would be much easier alone, at least for him. She'd have the full burden of telling the kids their father had died.

"When did you know I'd got it?" he asked, feeling much of the urgency had been taken away by Tanya's actions. He had some time left he was sure, and now most of the things he had to do had been done for him he could turn to less important things, like how long he had left.

The course of the disease from onset to end was three days, but the onset wasn't always obvious. It was important to know the instant he'd showed symptoms to try to get some idea of the time left. His current obsession he wouldn't have expected till near the end, but if he'd only started showing symptoms yesterday, or this morning when he noticed himself, then it was probably safe to assume he had at least one day left.

"You don't have it!" she stated flatly, throwing Sean into complete confusion. When Tanya said something that definite it was always right. For an instant hope and perhaps even relief swept through him, but a black cloud across his brain quickly dispelled that, replacing it with total despair. Why had she sent the kids away. He wouldn't even contemplate the obvious.

Then he began to see flaws in Tanya's actions. She'd sent the kids to Dad's, by themselves, on the train. The trains were erratic to say the least, and

the kids shouldn't be alone under any circumstances just now, let alone travelling.

"Come up stairs." She turned and hurriedly rushed up the steps. Sean hesitated a few seconds, almost refusing to move, refusing to let things go any further, but Tanya was soon out of sight, and that shocked him into action. He bounded up the stairs after her.

Tanya was in the bedroom. All five clocks they had were on her dressing table, all showing quarter to one. The implications took away Sean's breath. He refused to accept what she was implying. His own death he could take, but not hers.

"I've done little else but stare at them all morning," she said turning to face him but keeping the clocks in view. "You don't have it, you didn't even notice the room clock wasn't there. It's the only thing in the room I would have seen, and had a fit if I found it missing. You wouldn't believe the effort it took just to come down to meet you. I have to know the time every second."

The bottom had just fallen out of his world. He couldn't speak or even breathe properly. His eyes blurred, and all he could see clearly was in his mind, that was the vegetable in the street, and those in the church. When he thought he had it there were doubt's, he would never really believe it because he wouldn't feel it. But when someone he loved had it it was far more real and more devastating.

"It's too sudden!" he said, in complete denial. "It doesn't just come like that. This kind of obsession only comes at the end." He gestured at the clocks, the hands nearer the hour, but now totally immaterial to him.

"I watch the clock all the time. With you and the children coming and going at all times I have to, for meals and stuff. I wouldn't notice anything less than this."

"It could be a phantom bug, it's too sudden. I'd have noticed," he said, clutching at straws. She had to be mistaken, he would have noticed if she were watching the clock. He was sure he had it, they couldn't both go. What would become of the children. "This can't be happening, it can't be real," said Sean, shaking his head.

"It is real!" She said flatly, killing any hopes he had. Her tone said she knew, and he had to believe it. "I got these," she said holding out her hand showing three white tablets there. "I was going to take them just before twelve but couldn't do it. It didn't happen then, but it will. I can't take them, you'll have to do something."

This was far worse than any nightmare. A million times worse than having it himself, which seemed totally irrelevant now. The whole world was falling on his head, walls closing in. He fell on the bed, hands clasping his head. His mind was just running in circles, he couldn't accept this at all.

"Snap out of it!" shouted Tanya. "Get yourself together. We don't have time for this, you've got to do something." She was almost in tears, on the point of a complete breakdown. She'd held herself together until now by not really accepting it, but somehow Sean's reaction had broken her control.

"It's almost one, I can't take my eyes off the clocks. It could happen

any time. Sean I need you to help me." She burst into tears standing over him, all control now gone. "I don't want to be a cabbage!" she sobbed.

Sean got up and held her, trying desperately to get control of his mind. He had to be strong for Tanya, and the children. "If anything happens to you I'll take care of you, do what I have to. We don't have to do anything now, it might not happen." He was still clinging to the hope that she was mistaken. He could not accept that she would go before him. That had always been his biggest fear. He'd almost felt relief when he realised that he had it. He'd just have to wait and see, try to calm her. "Tell me about the kids, how did you send them?"

"I thought I was going to go this morning at ten, and after ten I was so shocked, and certain it would be soon I had to get them out of the house. I tried to call you but the phones are still down. Then we heard a train come in. I figured it would be safer to send them to the station than all the way across town to find you. I told them to come back if it wasn't the right train."

"All right, I'll go to dads myself as soon.....as I can."

"I'm scared Sean, I don't want to die, but I know it's going to happen soon. Do it now, and then get off to look after the children."

"Damn it do what!" he snapped, control slipping. She was asking him to kill her, strangle her, smash her head in, stick a knife in her. He couldn't do any.

"The tablets would work just as well as a suppository. I can't put them in my mouth but I could lay down for you to put them inside me. That wouldn't worry me, I wouldn't be taking them.

"Sean's face became red with rage. "Nobodies dying! You can't be certain, it might not happen. If it does we'll worry about it then, but not before. That's giving up before the games lost. I need a drink, and a little time to think." He let go of her and went down to the main room. He quickly poured himself a large brandy, tipped it straight down. His hands were shaking, but the fire in his throat calmed him. He poured another two, then went back to the bedroom.

"Here," he said holding out the drink without really looking at Tanya. He couldn't bare to see the defeat on her face. she was always the strong one, always in control. To see her like this more than anything else convinced him she was right. He couldn't handle this at all, he needed her more than ever now, and she was being taken away.

Tanya didn't respond, and Sean sheepishly looked up, ready to apologise for his weakness. As his eyes met hers he instantly saw the black gulf behind them, she was no longer there, just an empty shell standing by the bed.

Sean froze, stopped breathing, his mind completely numb. "Nooooo!" he screamed, dropping the glasses. "No..No..No."

He just stood there, staring at her, tears streaming down his face. Slowly anger began to overpower the shock, anger at the disease, anger at his own helplessness and the unfairness of it all. He dropped to the floor, rage and grief completely overwhelming him, taking away any sanity; and smashed his

fists into the carpet, taking his grief and hatred of the world out on the floor. That wasn't enough, he got up and smashed every clock in the room, then stamped on them till there was no piece big enough to break more. Then he smashed anything else that happened to be near. He threw a chair through the window, then smashed at the walls with another. He wanted to tear the house down with his bare hands, but he wasn't strong enough.

Then suddenly Tanya loomed in front of his eyes, stopping him, preventing further carnage in the room. Her face had no expression, was blank, as were her eyes. She stood calmly among the ruin facing the door, where he'd gone, deserted her in her moment of need. His anger turned inwards, he'd let her down. He should have been there for her, help her, but he'd left to get a drink. He couldn't curse himself hard enough, nor could he do anything else. Tanya standing there paralysed him.

She was gone. There could be no doubt, he was alone, but still she needed him. He had to take care of her as she'd requested. He instinctively knew there could be no revival. This wasn't like someone in a coma, or unconscious, where the person still resided deep in the brain. The virus left no doubt, brain waves were random, no logical thought was possible. Signals inside the brain were so scrambled it wasn't even possible to distinguish them from background radiation. The primitive brain seemed to retain part of its function for a while, and that was the cruellest twist to this whole thing, but even that degenerated within a few days.

Staring at Tanya eventually calmed him, made him think. Her need made him think. She was relying on him now totally. The roles were turned completely around. He'd always relied on her and she'd never let him down, he had to be as strong as she was.

Looking into her eyes once again took away any doubts or fears, she just wasn't there. The woman who was his life had gone, his reason for existence gone with her. He gently laid her on the bed and kissed her. The tablets were still in her hand, which opened easily.

As he looked at the tablets he was tempted to take them himself. He could give two to Tanya and take one himself. They always gave people three but one was enough. The other two were just to make sure, because people often dropped one or couldn't swallow them. Dissolved in the mouth they didn't work as quickly, unless you had a few.

He couldn't of course, because of the kids. He had no easy escape. Once Tanya was cared for he needed to find the children. He had to take Tanya's place, look after them, make them safe for when it got him. How he'd do that he couldn't even imagine. Thinking about it almost drove him mad again, so he concentrated on one thing at a time.

He placed all three tablets in Tanya's mouth, then sat on the bed cradling her head. He pressed her face against his, and at the same time felt her weak pulse in her neck. When that stopped he laid her back and closed her eyes. He covered her as though she were asleep, then went down and got another drink. He was tempted to drink the whole bottle, but then remembered what the last drink had cost, and flung the bottle with all his might against the

wall.

He went back to her, arranged the bedclothes neatly, as she liked, then went back downstairs. There were matches for the gas on the mantle piece, he quickly struck one and threw it into the brandy soaked carpet. Blue flames raced up the wet wall and spread into the room. Sean took a quick look around as the alcohol flame began to turn yellow and smoke as it set fire to the carpet, then walked out.

He stood in the deserted street a while watching as the house began to burn, making silent farewells to Tanya. Thin smoke began to drift from the smashed window, quickly turning thick and black, and bellowing up. Flames soon joined in, whipping the smoke into a black spiralling frenzy. Tears streamed down his face as the home that represented everything good that had happened to him was quickly being consumed. He turned his back on the flames and slowly headed for the railway station.

Row after row of red brick grey roofed terrace houses slowly floated past, the streets between completely void of people, but clogged with abandoned vehicles. With eyes focused just in front of his feet all went by unnoticed. Nothing outside that small area of focus registered. No thought or conscious control steered him, just an irresistible pull towards the station to follow his children, to find them, make them safe.

Smoke billowed up from the burning house as Sean moved woodenly away, but no alarm sounded. No fire engine, police or ambulance. The whole row of houses would probably burn to the ground. If there were any people still living there they'd have to move somewhere else. Sean never gave a thought to that. He didn't care about anything. His continued existence was for only one purpose, to take care of the children, his life had already ended.

He had no fear whatever of the disease any more, death just meant release from misery. Despite this he still glanced at his watch, through habit or compulsion he didn't know or care. It was now one thirty three, thirty three minutes after his wife's death, and maybe twenty seven to his own, and peace. A few hundred paces passed without time, he seemed to reach the railway in a flash, but his watch told him differently. A few more minutes had passed, a bit more of his limited existence consumed. Time he needed now, couldn't spare, but it trickled away inexorably, and like water through his fingers there was nothing he could do to slow it's progress. The minute hand climbed towards twelve with the power of a moving planet but he had things to do, and had only reached his first objective.

He rushed through the walkway to the station, a modern station, in as much as there was nothing much there. Twin tracks with platforms and shelters at one side and one old stepping bridge to connect them. At the far side an old red brick wall, the car park beyond, and town centre beyond that. On the near side bushes, caravans, and then the rows of houses.

Sean crossed the tracks, not bothering with the bridge, saving precious seconds. Smoke rising over the rooftops from Tanya's pyre assaulted his senses as he turned to face the tracks. A calm black cloud now, slowly drifting up, which seemed appropriate to his mood. After staring for a minute

he turned away, his eyes refusing further pain. He stared anxiously up and down the tracks for a train, but there were none. He'd have to wait, waste more time.

On a bench under the shelter sat a man, very smartly dressed, which seemed out of place somehow. People didn't spend as much time on their appearance now, didn't seem much point. After a quick glance to confirm he was alive Sean sat at the other end of the bench and held his head in his hands. He didn't want contact with anyone, he just wanted to grieve in silence, for his wife, himself and his children.

There was silence. No traffic noise, no children or people noise. Even the birds were subdued, but much more importantly for Sean there was no train noise. He strained his ears trying to force them to hear one no matter how far away, but the silence seemed to be deafening him.

"My wife went nearly two weeks ago," stated the stranger after a few minutes, breaking the silence and startling Sean. He wasn't really talking to Sean, just to the empty lines in front of him. "But that wasn't half as bad as when my colleagues went, one by one, even though I hated some of them."

Sean didn't want to hear this, wanted him to shut up so he could hear a train. He didn't particularly care about this man's colleagues, or his wife. He didn't care about the man. He glanced at his watch, one forty four, his anxiety rose with the hand. He was about to snarl some cutting remark to shut the man up, but he continued too quickly.

"We were the only team left still working on it, but one by one they went, down to four yesterday. Then I got it, now there's only three left, not enough. We hadn't even identified the agent, let alone found a cure. Now no one will. It'll wipe us out."

The man was speaking in riddles and Sean had no patience. He didn't bother replying, didn't even really hear what the man had said. His voice was impinging on Sean's mind though, making it work to interpret the words and he didn't want his mind working. He put his hands over his ears.

"It's probably due today sometime, or tonight. I can still look away from the clock up there, so I've got some time left."

Sean could hear the man despite his hands on his ears. What he said registered, because it affected Sean. Sean could look away from the clock, the man said that meant he had time left. Sean had thought he had time left, but had let depression take control, let his watch take control. His rising panic abated very slightly. He might survive the next hour, have another one to find the kids. He felt obliged to answer the man now, in gratitude.

"Look I'm sorry you have it but I've got problems of my own." That was the strongest polite hint to shut up that Sean could think of. Unfortunately this man wasn't taking hints.

"Was it your wife?" he asked, turning to look at Sean.

A pain shot through Sean's chest at the word wife. Visions of Tanya standing in the bedroom flooding his mind, guilt at not being with her at the end almost overwhelming him.

"Yes!" He snapped, feeling suddenly very angry. "I don't want to talk

about it."

Sean's control was tenuous in the extreme. Falling apart was a very real danger. Thinking about the children and nothing else had given him strength to get this far, but the reminder pushed him near the edge again. He held his head even more tightly, hoping the stranger would just shut up.

The stranger turned back to the tracks, but much to Sean's annoyance continued talking. "I came here to see my sister, but she'd already gone. Now all I've got left is my brother in Leeds. I don't know if he's still alive or not. I probably won't be able to find him anyway. Big cities are much worse than places like this. Here they still take away the bodies, there they don't any more. Too many, with too few alive to do it."

Sean jerked up his head and turned to the stranger. "How do you know what it's like in the cities, there's been no news for days?" he demanded, suddenly stung by the thought that his children may be in trouble. They'd gone to Woodlesford not Leeds, but it wasn't far from the city. Visions of them wondering through zombies and corpses almost set him panicking.

"Just came up from London, that resembles hell. Only a few thousand still alive, and half of them had it, with only a day or two left."

"Do you know when the Leeds trains due?" snapped Sean urgently, again glancing at the time. Frustration was taking control, and anger at his own helplessness.

"I don't think they have time tables any more. If there's a driver and any signalmen left they'll run one, if not we could be here a while."

"My children went through this morning, I've got to get there," he whined, to himself more than the stranger. He would probably break down crying shortly, or go on a rampage killing anyone he came across. Disaster after disaster was being piled on him and he wasn't up to it without Tanya.

"If you're still clear take a car, there's plenty about."

"Roads are all blocked!" snapped Sean, feeling the suggestion stupid and unhelpful. If the man couldn't say anything sensible he should keep his mouth shut. Sean was about to explode and his first victim was only speeding up the inevitable.

"Don't you know any back roads, or dirt tracks, fields you could cut across."

They were in the middle of a town, with all roads clogged. He couldn't get to back roads or fields. If this man made any more stupid suggestions he'd be swallowing teeth. In fact his next words whatever they were would be the last. Sean was now so frustrated and worried about his children, on top of his grief over Tanya, that he needed to act, do something. He needed to get to Woodlesford, but couldn't, panic was setting in. Killing this man seemed a good option, take it out on him.

After a short silence the man took Sean's lack of response as a negative. "What about a motorbike?"

Sean tensed his muscles for the first strike, then locked up. A bike, why didn't he think of that. He started cursing himself, even as he was jumping up. He glanced again at the time, one fifty three, and cursed himself harder for

wasting time. He scrambled over the wall and glanced up and down the car park, no bikes. He jumped over the other wall and ran into town. He frantically raced down the main street, dodging abandoned vehicles and a number of surprised people, but no bikes. He stopped and stared round in total frustration. People were watching him, but none approached. There might have been a dozen or so scattered about the street, collecting food from the shops, or just there for company. He didn't even notice them, didn't have time to notice them. He needed a motorbike. Then he remembered the bike shop near the bridge, and instantly sprinted off down a side street.

Like virtually all shops it was closed, but unlike most others that had been broken into, this had steel shutters. He tried banging on the doors, to no avail, then the man from the station came up and tried to help, but the shutters held fast.

"Get one of these cars and some rope and pull the doors down," suggested the stranger.

Sean spun round and raced for the nearest car in complete disbelief that he couldn't think of these things himself. It had no keys. He raced from car to car but didn't find one working and with keys. He eventually reached the main street again. He glanced at the clock on the library, two minutes past two, the hour had passed and he was still here. The relief almost made his legs collapse. He had another hour left, at least.

Only a handful of people were still on the streets, most had probably gone inside pubs as the hour approached. Two of those still out stood gazing at the library clock, unmoving. These latest victims had obviously just gone off. What few people were about were avoiding them. The lone policeman was probably dealing with others elsewhere, or gone off himself. Sean stopped to look at them despite the urgency he still felt. He couldn't resist, couldn't ignore them. They looked like normal people, still breathing, eyes open looking at the clock, but they weren't, they'd gone. Whatever made people human had gone. His ingrained social feelings still made him care about them, but his brain told him there was no point.

"Nothing we can do for them," said the stranger joining him, and again interrupting his misery. He'd attached himself to Sean, much to Sean's annoyance, and still insisted on speaking. "Fifty percent of the remaining population go every day. If there were one hundred here yesterday then today there are only fifty, and tomorrow twenty five."

Sean knew it was bad but that was the first time he'd heard those numbers. He'd been sheltered from the effects working in his studio. He was isolated on the industrial estate, having no visitors wasn't unusual for him. He was lucky to get one client a week normally. He saw little on his short drives to or from work and stayed in at night. He'd only that day seen his first victim actually go off, and only then because he'd come home early and had to walk.

It was less than two months since the first victims had been officially reported, and already the world's population was thought to be under one hundred million, and that estimate was days old, maybe a week or more. Many thought there were no more than a few million left, some putting the numbers

even lower. As Sean stared at the two he couldn't help but wonder if this really was the end, as the stranger suggested. Could a disease, any disease really beat man. Where was man's ingenuity, his sheer destructive power against a tiny, mindless, fragile piece of jelly.

Sean didn't have time to linger like this. He dismissed the two from his mind and immediately began checking cars in the street. He soon found one with the keys inside. He jumped in and his eyes immediately focused on the clock, five past two. He started it and set off but found his way blocked after less than fifty yards. He rammed into the offending car, pushing it far enough to allow him to squeeze through. This process he repeated several times before finally reaching the shop. He jumped out and looked in the boot, no rope. He raced round several other cars but couldn't find anything. He went back to the working car, turned it around and backed flat out into the motorcycle shop door. He managed to drive the car free of the wreckage leaving a large hole into the shop.

As Sean tried to fight his way out of the wrecked car the stranger walked up carrying a coil of rope. He tossed it away with a shrug, then helped Sean extricate himself. Sean dived into the shop and grabbed the first machine he came to. It was near the door and could be got out easily. He struggled through the hole with it then jumped on and pressed the starter, nothing happened. He cursed and was about to toss it aside and get another when the stranger came out with a handful of keys. He looked at the bike and then sorted through the keys, as Sean sat impatiently, feeling a little foolish.

"This should be the one," he said, handing the key over. "Can you take me with you please? I can't drive these things, and haven't a clue as to the way to Leeds from here."

"I'm not going to Leeds!" snapped Sean, having difficulty inserting the key.

"You were waiting for the Leeds train," said the man indignantly.

"It goes through Woodlesford, that's where my children are, where I'm going."

"Can you take me as far as this Woodlesford. Maybe I can walk from there or get a train. You might need help to get there, with all these wrecks and things blocking the way."

Unfortunately he made sense, Sean might need help, because he wasn't thinking straight at all. He did also have a certain amount of sympathy for the man, and he'd have to keep quiet on the bike.

"All right, I'll take you. Get on and hang on tight, I haven't ridden one of these things for ages, and never one this big."

The machine started easily and Sean managed to find first gear. He set off steadily, threading his way around wrecked and abandoned cars, trucks and buses, the stranger clinging to him for all he was worth. Although Sean hadn't ridden a bike in years he quickly regained his confidence. He'd actually have enjoyed the ride except that the panic he felt at the plight of his children made him push as hard as he could.

Once out of the centre the going was a little easier. There weren't

quite as many wrecks or abandoned vehicles. He quickly reached the river bridge and tested the bikes speed on the straights just beyond. Then he came to the first impassable obstruction, a pile of vehicles completely blocking the railway bridge. After a few seconds thought he decided to take to the paths along the river, so turned the bike and headed for the river.

He made good time along the river path, and didn't slow much through the twisting footpaths around the marina and locks. He shot under the little road bridge near the petrol depot but the path was very narrow. He misjudged it, clipping the handlebar on the stone bridge. He wobbled under the bridge, and for a second thought he was going to make it, but he couldn't turn away from the river as he cleared the bridge, the path and bank did. They sailed straight out over the water, then smashed into it a few feet from the pilings.

By some miracle neither of them was badly hurt, and both managed to scramble to the side and climb out. They both sat on the grass trying to get their breath, and clear their lungs of any water.

"What do we do now?" asked the stranger, wiping water from his face as it ran from his hair.

"We'll have to walk. It's not far though. I just need a couple of minutes to get my breath." The crash had really shaken him up. Killing himself wouldn't help the children, and they were all that mattered now. He had to survive and be intact to take care of them. His father couldn't cope with them alone, and he didn't know how long his father had before he caught it. Between them they should be able to work something out though. That was his only hope, that his father could come up with a plan of action.

"I'm actually relieved to hear that," said the man. "Even though I don't much fancy walking in soaking clothes. That ride was the most terrifying thing I've ever done."

"I was scared as well, but a fatal smash is probably better that what awaits us," replied Sean glancing at his watch urgently. The thought had just occurred that water might have broken it and his heart almost stopped until he confirmed it's continued operation. The glance also told him time was passing and he couldn't afford to rest long. It was a few minutes to three, he'd wait till after three.

"I suppose that's true enough. It's a nasty end."

"You say you've been studying this disease, what do people think, or feel as they go off." Sean could still clearly see Tanya standing by the bed. He'd never be free of that sight. It blotted out every other picture of her, every memory of the happy times. It was often said that time was the great healer, what a joke that had become.

"I don't know, but they feel or think nothing after, and as going off is virtually instant I would guess its a very painless way to go. Our studies were not into it's effects, we were concentrating on transmission, trying to identify the agent. Most suspect a virus, but if so it's like no other virus ever encountered. It seemed to appear simultaneously in places thousands of miles apart, and in some cases with no possible physical links."

Sean had no interest in how it spread. As far as he was concerned it was too late to worry about that, he had it. What did concern him were the effects. What was it like, did the lights just go out, was there pain, distress. What were the last few seconds like, hell or just quiet release.

"What about those that go off and go on a rampage. They must be thinking something." Sean was remembering the newscasts from early on when spectacular disasters had been shown of people doing all kinds of strange things in their madness.

"No I don't think so. If you're moving, doing something when it happens, you tend to keep doing it for a while. Some people go insane just prior to the event, because a few minutes before it happens you know its going to. People who get guns to kill themselves may well turn the weapons on others at that time. They then keep on firing till the guns empty, they can't think to stop firing. I heard about a runner who went off on the track, he ran around for nearly a day before he dropped."

Sean felt just a little comforted by this, and glanced again at the time, one minute past three. Safe for another hour, he couldn't stay here though, they had to get moving. It was still quite a walk, preferably in silence. The other seemed to need to talk though, and Sean didn't have the heart to stop him. He could no longer place himself in that position, he'd already died, the disease held no fear, but he could sympathise with the plight and fear of others.

"This is the fastest and worst mass extinction the world has ever seen. The dominant race wiped out in less than one season. Even an asteroid like the one that wiped out the dinosaurs wouldn't have been as thorough or fast."

"We're not wiped out!" Stated Sean, unwilling or unable to accept that his children would also go off at some time. He couldn't even accept that as a possibility, even though all reason said they had to, like everyone else.

"We will be though, we have no defence. Even the crew of a nuclear submarine was affected. They'd been out for weeks, and were told to remain submerged, the authorities suspecting some kind of attack. They only surfaced and returned to port when almost twenty percent of the personnel had gone off, and it became evident that all enemies were equally affected."

"There must be people immune to it, there always are."

"Maybe, but how are they going to survive. We have found no common factor affecting victims or survivors. This really is a truly democratic disease. Speaking of surviving I haven't eaten today and I'm feeling very chilled with these wet clothes on."

Sean hadn't eaten either, and was also feeling the cold. He decided that he'd better eat and perhaps dry off a little. He didn't want pneumonia to kill him. It wasn't very far and a few minutes wouldn't make much difference. He'd be there well before the hour.

They walked along the river about a mile then cut across a field to a small housing estate. The houses were fairly new, built close together. Narrow twisting streets separated them, clogged with vehicles, but no sign of people. After knocking on the door of the first house they came to and getting no reply Sean decided to break in.

"I hope this is empty," he said as he smashed a window and then opened it. Although no laws had any meaning any more he still felt guilty about entering someone's house.

"The chances are pretty good," replied his companion. "Well over ninety percent of the people are gone."

Sean didn't argue. His own town had been almost deserted. All their immediate neighbours had gone, either dead or moved somewhere else. These last days there had been less and less people about on the streets, almost no cars still running. Few houses showed any signs of people still there.

He climbed in through the living room window, the other followed into a room that showed every sign of recent use, and no sign of abandonment. There were partly used candles on every surface, letters and other papers on the table along with two empty cups.

They moved to the kitchen, it was clean, everything washed and in racks. The fridge was empty and a camping stove had been placed on top of the cooker. The cupboards were full of tins of food, and numerous packet foods were under the counters. Several containers of water were on one counter.

"Whoever lived here stocked up well," remarked the stranger, being very casual. Not at all how Sean felt. He almost expected some indignant resident barging in demanding to know what they were doing. "Cans of stew look nice," he continued, grabbing a pan and starting the camping stove. "Have a seat, I'll have some heated in a few minutes."

Sean couldn't sit down, and decided to explore the other rooms, mainly looking for fresh clothes or perhaps even clues as to the fate of the owners. The shock of finding a man and woman on the bed almost took away his appetite. Both seemed to be sleeping, but they weren't. They'd both taken pills, and not long ago, maybe hours or a day at most.

"One of them went off and the other joined them," remarked the man over Sean's shoulder. He seemed remarkably casual about death, perhaps because he'd be joining the rest shortly. "Even if there are people immune most may commit suicide under similar circumstances, because the only way anyone will know they're immune is if they're still alive when the disease is over. Come on downstairs, food is ready."

Sean ate quickly, not really enjoying it at all. He felt they should do something for the couple upstairs, but couldn't afford to waste the time.

"Let's get out of here," said Sean, sickened and a little scared. He'd thought about doing the same thing.

They moved hurriedly through the streets finally arriving at his father's house. The stranger took his leave after Sean gave what directions he could and continued towards the city. Sean opened the door and went straight in, his father was sat on a couch staring at the clock on the mantle piece. Sean's heart almost stopped.

"Dad where are the kids?" he asked, his jaw so slack he barely got the words out.

"At home I suppose, what are you doing here?" his father glanced at

him for a second but instantly turned back to the clock, shredding more from Sean's heart. He knew his father well, and this behaviour was so alien to him that it left no doubt that he had it, and at a very late stage.

"Tanya sent them here this morning," replied Sean, his voice quivering with grief for his father and fear for his children.

"They haven't been here, nobody has. TV doesn't work, radio doesn't work, nothing works, except my clock. I think I've got it, but I don't feel scared, just sad. Sad for all the young people." His father was well gone. He loved the children, would normally have had a fit at even the possibility of anything wrong. Now he seemed more concerned about his TV.

"I have to go look for Rob and Sue," said Sean, tears streaming down his face. "They might have got lost or something." Sean was clutching at ever thinner straws. Both his children had been here dozens of times, they knew the way better than he did. He had to go to try to find out what had happened to them. "Can you help dad?" he pleaded.

"What do you want me to do? I can't walk more than a few yards, can't really leave this room, and I don't know how long I've got." He'd given in, been beaten by the disease. As far as Sean was concerned he'd already gone, his father was no more.

"What about the neighbours?" asked Sean. Many were good people he'd known since a child. Most would help others in need.

"All gone, nobody left."

Sean had never felt so depressed and hopeless. It was only about a half a mile to the station, but that was through buildings. There were numerous routes. It needed a lot of people to check them all, see if the children were in trouble somewhere along the way. The stranger had gone on towards the city, so there was no one to help.

"I'll have to go look for them dad, but I'll come back as soon as I can. If they turn up keep them here." He left the house without another glance at his father, and ran all the way following what he thought the most likely route.

There were a few bodies in some of the quieter streets, along with numerous vehicles. Some of the bodies were children, but not his. He saw no one alive, unless you could call people without a brain alive. To him they were just machines on idle, no controller, no person inside to make them alive.

The station was no different as far as people went. It was not really a station, just a train stop. A hundred metres up the track was the still smouldering wreckage of two trains. The pieces were well scattered, so they must have hit at speed. Sean jumped to the track and raced to them. There were several bodies in one of the trains, but no children, and no survivors. That meant someone had rescued the injured, taken them somewhere, but where. No ambulance could get through, and the hospitals no longer had doctors or nurses.

Sean wandered the streets around the station, but saw no living people, and no signs of an improvised hospital. He went back to his father's house, his father hadn't moved.

"Dad there's been a train crash, do you know anything about it, where

they've taken the survivors?"

"I don't take any notice of crashes any more, too may."

"Dad I need help!" said Sean, moving in front of his father. "I've got to find the kids. Where can I look, where might they have taken them?" He felt completely helpless. Frustration and panic were almost overwhelming him. He had no time or much sympathy left to give to his fathers plight. As far as he knew he was in the same position, but he couldn't give up. He had to find the children before he went off, try to get them safe. How he would do that he hadn't thought about, nor could he. Find them first and worry about the rest later.

"Son I don't know," replied his father harshly, moving so he could see the clock, but at least sounding alive for the first time. Sean blocking his view of the clock had at least woken some spirit. "If I could help you I would, but I don't think I could leave this room. It won't be long now."

Sean wanted to tear out his hair. He felt so useless he wished the damned disease would take him now. He'd let his wife down and he was letting his children down.

"Try the school, that's used for everything. Come back if you can."

Sean knew what he meant, and it ripped a little more from what was left of his heart. He raced out with tears welling, but he had no time for pity, for himself or anyone else.

He passed two people slowly moving the same direction but decided against stopping. He pressed on till he came to the school, and ran straight in the gates. There were six people standing in the door, perhaps waiting for something.

"Are the survivors from the train crash here?" panted Sean as he came up to them.

"What few there were. Only seven of us. The woman inside is badly injured."

"Two children, a girl and boy, nine and twelve."

"No children, sorry."

"No children," stammered Sean finding speech difficult. "There had to be. They must have been on the train. Did you take any bodies away?"

"No, we are the only ones. There were no children on the train, I was the driver, brought it from Sheffield and no children got on."

"From Sheffield," stammered Sean, this was the wrong train. "What about the one you hit?"

"Only the driver on that one, but another train apparently went through earlier without stopping."

"Where was it heading?" That was a stupid question and Sean almost retracted it. The lines went to Leeds from here, and trains tended to follow them.

"It would probably be routed onto the coast line when it reached Leeds, towards York. The driver had probably gone off because it was supposed to stop here. It's a long stretch of line with nothing to hit assuming there are still some signalmen on duty. With any luck it will run out of fuel

before it hits anything. Nothing else they could do."

Sean's jaw almost hit the floor, after feeling relief that they weren't in the crash. Now he'd have to try to follow the tracks to the coast. No matter what, the children were going to be on their own for days. He felt like collapsing and crying, but he couldn't. He sprinted back towards the railway station.

The first well documented experiments on ionization and its effects on humans was carried out in the late 1920's. Simply charging the air or person electrically negative or positive can alter their mood, well being and even state of consciousness. It is not difficult to use ionization to torture, injure or control people in their own homes. For ordinary people it's almost impossible to detect and totally impossible to block.

It can also be used to influence people on a massive scale. Ionization caused by radiation from a powerful satellite could depress whole sections of the population.

Chapter 2

Chantry surveyed his empire from the bridge of the generator ship moored to the harbour wall. One small seaside town. How the mighty had fallen. This is what he had left after one slight mistake, and he was just as trapped here as all these peasants. The only consolation, if it could be called that, was that it was his, just his. He had no peers. Of all the elite that had run the world for decades only he had survived as far as he knew. He just happened to be aboard this ship when things went wrong. Of course there might have been other levels above him, almost certainly were but he knew nothing about them. If they had survived they would have to be in the fabled secret bases and he wouldn't expect any interference from them..

There was a lot to do of course to ensure he remained a survivor, and he'd have no intentional help. The compliant governments were all gone, the financial weapons, the secret services, all the tools of mass population control were gone. Much of the technology was still in place, but useless without power and operators. The only technological tools left that he could use were aboard this ship, and of course those in town powered from the ship. These were basically for individual or small group control.

He had one other asset, himself, his own personal power. Psychic power couldn't be measured or quantified easily, but compared to those with none Chantry stood just beneath a God. His kinetic powers were negligible but in mind control he'd stood with the best, and now stood above all. Unfortunately he could only exert influence or control on relatively small numbers at any one time by mind alone.

He had two main problems to solve. Firstly, covert control took time and effort, so he couldn't stay completely hidden now. He'd have to work a little more openly, always dangerous. These animals around him, his lieutenants, thought themselves his equal. They thought they were in control.

He could make any of them do or think anything he wanted. Sooner or later though he'd need to take outright control, because he couldn't watch all of them all the time, and they sometimes made decisions he knew nothing about. They were so stupid he couldn't predict their actions. Before he made them elect him leader he needed to be sure such a position was safe though.

The second problem, telepathy. Many of the people left had some abilities in the psychic area. Those in town he could block, but those still outside he had virtually no influence on. All emergency transmitters had been set to transmit directly to peoples brains telling them to come here, but the effectiveness was patchy. Time both helped and hindered. Time to succumb to the transmission or the virus or time to develop mentally. He had no way of predicting which it would be. If only a few developed to any great extent it could spread faster than any virus, and that really would be a serious problem.

He'd done all he could in that area and turned from the window as 'slime mouth' approached, otherwise known as tribune Moran. He'd been director of a large company till a few months ago, invited into the controlling tribunal because of his organisation skills, not his personality. He hated everyone else, believing himself superior. Most of the others had been in security organisations of one kind or another.

"Tribune Chantry," he opened, almost spitting venom. A complete animal, totally unable to control the primitive instincts that drove him. "We're still waiting for your vote!"

Chantry had almost forgotten they were having a meeting. They were voting on some completely irrelevant minor matter, something to do with work assignments for the other peasants. Chantry voted yes, not knowing or caring about the outcome. Moran made a slimy smile, and turned back to the others, obviously pleased. Chantry turned back to the window. He might even make Moran his second in command, he had the right character, but on the downside were questions about how loyal he'd be. Still, that could always be solved with leverage of some kind.

He looked out of the window again, scanning the town for signs of danger. He could see the houses and shops rising up the side of the valley. All the peasants moving about in the narrow twisting steep streets. Near the top were no people, the houses, hotels and shops all deserted. The only populated areas were those he could physically see from the ship. He was almost blind psychically, because of the barriers he'd had to erect. He could only sense things about people he could actually see. Even that was limited and clouded, the main thing being sensed were thousands of blank people, blocked by radiation and drugs.

These people were completely under his power, but only a year ago most of the world had been, billions. Now there were only thousands.

All inhabited areas were well bugged, every house, every room open to his scrutiny. He hadn't had to set any of this up of course, he simply tapped into the existing security mechanisms that had been in use for decades in this and all towns in this country. Unfortunately the ships power had limits, and could only power a small part of the town. That wouldn't be a problem soon.

When he got enough peasants here he'd work out how to restart the nearest power station, re power the whole town and expand from there.

Noises behind disturbed his planning, the meeting had come to a close. He turned and stood with his back to the window watching as the others slowly departed. He nodded to those who acknowledged him but said nothing. He disliked them all, and was fairly sure the feelings were mutual. They needed him and his ship though, and he needed them. Common need made a very stable relationship. Bonds of friendship or even love could be very fickle and undependable.

Just as the last of them cleared the large bridge Chantry suddenly felt the room not empty. He quickly scanned it, not instantly understanding what had happened. It was empty, the feeling came from outside. Not just outside the ships bridge, or even the ship but outside town, outside his control. He instantly became tense, and tried to focus his mind on it, but couldn't. It was a strange sensation, very tenuous, almost not there, but it seemed to be a stirring in the general consciousness. Another presence on the higher levels causing a disturbance.

The levels had been empty and calm for so long he'd almost forgotten what it felt like to have company there. The thought of another being accessing those regions didn't go down well at all, and gave him a real shock. This could be a problem that had to be dealt with immediately, because it could be a direct threat to him.

It could of course just be some natural disturbance, but he'd survived this long by not ignoring his senses. This felt like another presence, another mind. He couldn't be certain because he couldn't tune to it, identify it, but he had to make that assumption.

There were several possible scenarios if a human were the source, and none of them would be to his benefit. A power of some kind outside, beyond his reach. It was always possible that others of the elite had survived, or maybe someone from a higher level if there was one. This would be the least damaging possibility, but he wasn't comforted. This didn't feel like any effect they would cause. This disturbance felt something like uncontrolled, unrestrained power. Someone with the power of the elite but not their self control. A rogue. They cropped up now and again but were easily detected and neutralised. Unfortunately he couldn't detect this one blinded as he was. If it was a rogue he'd just have to hope it came within his reach, before it realised the power it had, or infected any others. He couldn't go and hunt it personally.

He felt incredible frustration at not being able to do anything. This problem needed solving now, but it would be a long time before he could extend his reach beyond town. The only thing he could do was ignore it for now, hope he was wrong and that it was some natural thing, or hope it came to town. If it did, whether rogue or elite didn't matter. He had the ship and the power. No mind could stand against psychotronic weapons.

For hundreds of years telepathy and psychic power in general had been denied the general population. The peasants weren't fit to possess such power, it would be like making everyone rich. Who'd do the work. They

needed controlling. Power and wealth both became meaningless if everyone had the same amount, it meant no one had any. Chantry and his predecessors had maintained the world, allowed progress, protected the peasants from themselves.

All this was now threatened. They were back in medieval times, but without the tools of control that were in place then. Religion couldn't be used because few would accept anybody claiming to represent God. Food couldn't be used, there were so few survivors that it wouldn't be a problem for centuries. Force they were using as best they could, but with people so scattered and such a small army it wasn't very effective. Declaring any rogues witches also wouldn't work. Instead of being burnt as in the past they'd attract a following. Study of their powers would follow and enlightenment of the rest not far behind. The elite could no longer interfere with study and discredit psychic abilities.

Chantry needed help. He couldn't operate at all outside the town. He needed a sub elite, those with some powers but subservient to him. He needed to identify and then train rogue children from very young to join him. Normally rogue peasant children had been killed or suppressed for life, candidates for the elite chosen only from the highest classes. Now that would change, for a while at least. He'd have to take every suitable child he could find, and it would still take years. They had to be brought up as the superiors they were, given the right attitudes towards the peasants. Only then could they be trained and allowed to use their psychic abilities.

Of course he could take ordinary children and train them, but it would take much longer. They now knew that everyone had the same potential, but some abilities were very hard to teach, and some he didn't even know how to teach. He'd just have to hope he could find enough rogues.

Chantry glanced once more round the hills surrounding the harbour, straining his senses. The disturbance was still there, still only just perceptible, still completely undefinable.

"Are you a rogue out there?" he said aloud, "or just some unusual radio disturbance?"

He quickly glanced round to make sure he was alone. He smiled to himself. All these problems were distracting him, making him careless. He could do nothing about the disturbance whatever it was. Best just to concentrate on what he could do. He needed to get back to his cabin, relax and tune into each of his lieutenants in turn, find out what they were thinking, correct any erroneous thoughts. Then he had to tune into the field commanders, the ones currently in town, find out what was happening outside. Then he needed food and sleep to rebuild himself because he'd be drained. The physical demands of running everything personally were enormous.

Sleep eluded him, even after his exertions. He rose in the early hours and wandered around the ship, still unable to ignore the disturbance. His mind reached into the fog constantly, to no avail. He even thought about shutting down the satellite so he could drop the barriers, locate whatever it was. That thought he quickly dismissed. Once the satellite was shut down it was always

possible it wouldn't restart, there were still far too many people too widely scattered to end it now. All kinds of groups would develop and grow and without interference from the elite some would certainly develop psychic powers. If that happened there would never be another elite, and his own days would be numbered.

He made for the hold where most of his tools were stored. These consisted of chemicals mostly, but also some electronic equipment. Just now he only needed blood thinning chemicals. This was an every day chore, making sure his lieutenants body temperatures were kept down, inhibiting their power and slowing their minds. They did the same to the rest of the population thinking themselves safe. He smiled at that as he made his way to the galley to treat the food and water.

As he placed the chemicals his smile turned a little sour. The disturbance made him think about a super elite. Was there one, and were they still alive, controlling him as he controlled those below him. He believed he was in the top echelon, but so did those below him, and those below them. That was the whole point of mind control, to make slaves believe they were masters. Were things really simpler now, had all the layers been stripped away by this disaster, or was all this just some part of a super elite plan to reduce the population. Perhaps there was even a super super elite. He could go crazy thinking like this. After the food he sprayed a heat activated chemical on all the fabric materials they were likely to contact, then returned the chemicals to his hold.

He had to do something about this disturbance, he couldn't ignore it. Instructions to the field officers would have to be changed. They'd have to be told to actively search for survivors and force them to come here, instead of just guiding those that want to come. Walking back onto the ships bridge he almost stumbled into Actin. His mind had been so pre-occupied he hadn't sensed him. Which shock was greater, almost being caught with the chemicals or not sensing someone's approach, Chantry couldn't decide.

"What do you want!" he snapped harshly. He was tense, couldn't read the man's thoughts. Anger was blinding him, and that made him even worse, almost afraid.

"Nothing!" retorted Actin, recoiling from Chantry. He'd never seen him angry, didn't expect it. "I couldn't sleep, so just came down here for fresh air. I didn't expect anyone here."

Actin appeared to be the weakest of his lieutenants. He seemed slightly retiring by nature, very none aggressive, but it was all a front. Chantry could see straight through him, as could many of the others. He was the most dangerous in many ways, because he kept his thoughts deep, hidden. He had suspicions about Chantry but kept them suppressed. Only occasional glimpses flashed to his conscious thoughts which Chantry could access.

"Sorry for snapping," replied Chantry, hiding his anger but still not in control of it, however he was in control of his voice and would completely mask the confusion in his head. "I was worrying about the progress we were making in getting everyone here. You took me by surprise." Even in anger and

confusion he would turn the conversation towards his own ends. For him it was natural to do that, he knew no other way.

Actin relaxed slightly, instantly assuming the mood of the conversation. "Yes, it is worrying. So many dying needlessly. Perhaps we should use stronger persuasion on those outside, for their own good. The transmission doesn't seem as effective as you said. The more we get in here under our protection the more chance we have of restarting civilisation when this is over."

Chantry winced at his words, his mind running all over the place. Those were the exact words he would have placed in Actin's mind, but he hadn't. Had someone else? He couldn't read Actin at all, nor detect any other influence on him if there was one because of his own anger and confusion. He drastically needed to get calm, clear his mind, but under these conditions he couldn't.

Chantry himself had only just thought seriously about using force to bring others here, was that his own thought, or was he too being influenced. He started looking back in his mind for other clues, other indications of remote control.

"Are you all right tribune Chantry?" asked Actin, seeing the far away look on Chantry's face.

"Yes," stammered Chantry, finding it impossible to think at all. "Perhaps we should change our tactics. Why don't you propose it at the next meeting. Many of the transmitters will be running out of power anyway. In the meantime I must get some rest, so I think I'll retire. Good morning."

He moved away quickly and rushed back to his cabin. Once inside he stood with his back to the door staring round the small room. Was there someone else here. Was someone intruding into his life and mind as he did to others. As an abstract concept a super elite had always been a puzzle, but now it was more than that. Now it appeared as a definite possibility.

Was that the disturbance, someone intruding mentally, controlling his lieutenants. Had he sensed a super elite at work. Was that possible. His mind just ran in circles, he could resolve nothing without further knowledge. He needed to clear his mind, get rid of these feelings, fear, anger, frustration. Start thinking logically. If a super elite were at work he'd slipped up, if not then Actin thinking the same way he had was just coincidence. Problem with that was that he'd been an elite too long to believe in coincidence, made too many happen. Up till this disaster next to nothing happened in the world without being initiated by, or at least sanctioned by the elite.

He moved to his concealed compartment and opened it revealing his monitor. He began selecting cameras at random, catching glimpses of peoples rooms, outside areas, public buildings etc. Nothing unusual flashed before him until a couple having sex stopped him. They were in bed but because virtually all spying devices used microwaves the bedclothes etc. were invisible. He paused on the scene, finding it slightly arousing. He even considered interfering, hitting them with a charge or something as he'd done countless times to countless people, then he realised this was just clouding his thought

further. He slammed the monitor back into the compartment. There were thousands of spying devices in the town. Without knowing what to look for it was pointless.

Sleep, that's what he needed. Just restful sleep. After seven or eight hours his mind would be clear. He quickly got into bed and set the transmitter for ten minutes, just enough to put him out. He didn't like using radiation on himself, but drastic situations required drastic actions. He'd never get to sleep otherwise. Even so it took most of the ten minutes before he succumbed.

The human body is an electro-mechanical machine. It makes extensive use of both chemical and electromagnetic systems. Both can be manipulated by others to control, influence, cure or kill an individual.

Chemical manipulation is easily understood, but the influence of electrical or magnetic fields is not, at least by the majority. Medical research into these fields does not seem to have kept pace with chemical research. No doubt the difficulty of testing on humans has much to do with that. These restraints were not in place during the last war, but any medical information gained by the Nazi's in concentration camps is a very sensitive issue. This would not stop the 'intelligence services' using such information. They are the ones that collected it, and have shown no inclination towards morality with their experiments on soldiers after the war in such places as Porten Down.

chapter 3.

Sean walked the tracks through a forest of silent dingy houses. Concrete sleepers spaced too closely for normal walking threatened injury if a foot went half into the stone fill, several inches below. The urgency of his quest made shortening his stride almost impossible, causing constant corrections and near misses. Brain and legs couldn't get in sync, panic signals to one leg or the other going out often to push the foot further for a clean landing in the stone.

Attempts at walking beside the tracks proved even worse. Large uneven stones didn't move in a predictable way under foot, putting great strain on legs and ankles. It also created a great deal of noise, very important because of near complete silence from surrounding houses. Any noise he made unnerved him.

He'd never experienced a silence like this. There was always traffic noise, everywhere, for the most part unnoticed, just background hum. In it's absence it became very noticeable. His ears were straining to detect what they always had, becoming ultra sensitive as though trying to compensate for sudden deafness. The part of his brain dealing with sound demanded conscious attention, because it believed there was a malfunction, which meant he couldn't help but notice the silence. Any sounds he made were amplified greatly, and seemed to echo round the buildings.

Few humans had ever experienced true silence. There were natural noises in the woods or fields, animals, birds, insects and such, but towns

without people were silent. The buildings absorbed what few natural sounds there were. Yet because there were buildings you assumed people, and people keeping silent and unseen was always threatening. The fact that in this case there really were no people didn't calm natural fears evolved over millions of years.

When Sean left the houses and moved into more open country he felt no easier. The tracks cut through a partial wasteland of old pit stacks, long disused. Large patches of spindly silver birch sprouted here and there preventing a total grey desert, but almost nothing else could get a foothold here. Red brown stains from rain drainage streams conjured up visions of a land that was bleeding to death. They'd done to this land what the virus was now doing to them. He almost smiled to himself at the thought, a vengeful Earth. Many believed it though. Religious groups had sprung up all over worshipping the Earth, but none had caught on. They'd been decimated just as badly as everyone else.

He moved on through to the next wasteland, the old marshalling yards. There was no sign of life at all in these areas, and the same total silence. This land had been levelled, covered in fill and tracks, and on top of that coal dust had accumulated over the years. The stacks were grey this was a darker grey. These areas were not helping Sean's depressed mood, and were making him even more nervous. He felt more exposed with each sound he made, felt he was visible to unseen eyes a long way off in distant houses or patches of woodland.

Being alone, truly alone was something else he'd never experienced, and this made him afraid, made him not wish to expose his presence. He didn't fear any specific danger, simply general fear common to all isolated people. As social animals humans are not well equipped for solitary existence.

Sean had other fears that were in some ways more pressing. A burning almost consuming fear for his children. They were alone somewhere, with no one to help them. It would be night soon and he could feel their fear and panic. They'd be crying for him and Tanya to help them, but there'd be no help. Tanya was dead and Sean useless.

His other fear, his watch. It terrified him, but he couldn't stop looking at it. Each time the minute hand approached twelve his stomach knotted, his heart strained and he came close to panic himself. He wanted to throw it away, but couldn't. He needed to know the time. It was more than a need, it was a basic urge, completely undeniable. The relief he felt each time the hand passed twelve was equally as strong as the fear just before had been. It meant he had another hour, at least. One more hour to find his children and somehow make them safe.

The same drama of almost overwhelming fear followed by unbelievable relief replayed every hour as the sleepers passed endlessly beneath his feet.

As he came into the city his fear increased greatly. There were occasional noises now, echoing round the derelict factories and empty offices that now enclosed the tracks. These noises were howling noises, or sudden

crashing noises, not natural but not human either. At least not the kind of noises you would walk towards, more noises you would run from.

Although still daylight it seemed dim somehow. The westering sun couldn't reach the tracks, and its light on surrounding buildings seemed weak and watery. A red tinge to everything served to enhance the threat of the noises, made everything seem surreal, nightmarish. His footsteps seemed to echo, making him walk even more carefully. Then his heart stopped. Beside the tracks just ahead was a body.

Seeing a body here seemed much more significant than the hundreds of others he'd see near his fathers, and much more sinister. He associated cities with drugs, crime and violence and instantly assumed this to be a victim of such. He approached carefully, glancing round for the perpetrators. He soon realised his caution was needless. Staring eyes, neutral facial expression and no sign of violence. This man was just another victim of the virus.

Sean actually found the body comforting. All past reality had been swept away when this disease struck, especially when it came home and took Tanya. He'd kind of got used to the new reality of death everywhere, but then on his lonely walk up the tracks his mind had begun to doubt that reality. The body brought it back, took away any doubts. It was comforting to be certain again, no matter how gruesome that certainty was.

He stepped carefully past the body, feeling nothing at all for the man. He was probably in his forties, but had dirty jeans on, always a bad sign, but especially in these times when anyone could choose whatever clothes they wanted. His rough shirt and light jacket weren't clean either. A man who'd been in pieces before the virus got him. Sean had little respect for people like that.

As he moved forward he could see the station not far away. A bend in the tracks meant that only a small part was visible at first, but each step brought more into view. He could soon make out bundles on the platforms. Not very many really, far less than he might have expected. Then he could see enough to awake the fears for his children. The line he was on passed straight through, but adjacent lines ended in the station. How they ended wasn't obvious, because all that end of the station was one huge pile of wreckage. It might have been one large train that had hit at speed or several smaller ones piled into each other. The wreckage was so mangled it was impossible to say.

Urgency again drove his feet, and as soon as he could he jumped to the platform at the side. On the smooth surface he could make much better speed, despite having to dodge round bodies. At least they were all reasonably fresh, no old rotting ones. This meant they were still removing them until very recently.

This gem of information he found in a way comforting, but it didn't allay his nervousness in this place. He felt very vulnerable. Deserted stations were often portrayed in films as the setting for muggings and murder, and this impression was well ingrained. Things weren't helped by the destruction. A pile of rubble where the other lines ended spilled over onto this platform. The buildings ended at this platform and the line went down the side, but the rubble

reached right up to the line, blocking the platform.

He decided to run, get past the station as quickly as possible. He sprinted along leaping over bodies and any other obstacles. He felt good running, and saw no problem jumping the rubble, so long as he was near the edge of the platform where it was low. He could have got down to the tracks and walked but he felt he was making progress at last.

Although dangerously close to the edge he judged his leap perfectly, and sailed over the pile. In mid air he caught sight of a man crouching against the wall behind the rubble. The man wasn't just crouched, he was actually springing like a frog towards Sean. He must have heard Sean's footsteps, and was springing his ambush.

Sean could do nothing. He seemed to float forever in the air while the man shot closer, already swinging his fist to meet Sean's face as he landed. Sean ducked instinctively before his feet had made good contact. He avoided the fist, but one of his feet came down on the rounded edge of the platform. His forward speed meant he couldn't regain balance on the other and his leg gave way, slamming him on his chest on the edge then flipping him over onto the fill beside the lines three feet below, where he rolled, bounced and slid to a stop face down in the stone.

Sean couldn't move, or feel much of his body. He was completely stunned, but still semi-conscious. The man ran down the platform and Sean could hear him running along beside the tracks in the fill. He moved like a man running for his life, and Sean listened till he got out of hearing, or left the tracks. Why he'd run was a mystery. Sean was virtually out, certainly not up to a fight of any kind. The man could have robbed him, killed him or done anything he wanted.

Pains began to tell Sean that he wasn't paralysed nor unscathed. The level of pain rapidly increased as the shock wore off, causing him to make enough effort to move. He managed to get to a sitting position where he could stare at skinned shins and sweat with pain. His eyes blurred and thinking became impossible. He sat rocking back and forth cursing and praying alternately for several minutes before the pain eased enough for him to think. He had to check himself out, find out what damage had been done.

Everything seemed to function, in a fashion. Nothing appeared to be broken, he wasn't leaking seriously. He glanced down the tracks but there was no sign of the man. He struggled to his feet and immediately saw the laptop computer on the platform, lid open with screen on the back and a black and white TV picture of a man. Sean pulled himself to the platform and bent down to the machine. It was no computer, at least none he was familiar with. It had no real keyboard, just a number of ball mice and numerous control buttons and sliders. In narrow compartments either side of the controls were camera like objects which lifted out, with long coiled wires attaching to the case.

Sean took all this in as he bent over the case, he also saw for a second a look of horror on the man in the picture, then the screen flashed to a prompt of some kind. Sean was no expert on computers. He was familiar with his own laptop, and the computer he used at work, at least familiar with the programs

he used, but if anything went wrong he called for the repair man. He was curious about this machine because someone had attacked him apparently because he'd disturbed them while they were using it. Just now wasn't the time though. He was still in agony from his injuries and he still had to get to the children. He closed the case, picked it up and set off limping along the platform and down onto the lines.

He'd have a close look this machine after he found the kids, in the mean time it was fairly heavy and solid, would make a good meal for the man that ran off if swung hard enough, should he meet him again. Once the man got over the shock of the encounter he might just decide he wanted it back.

Once clear of the station Sean soon had to walk between the rails again. Limping with a shortened stride dictated by the sleeper spacing proved to be agonising. Every bruised muscle in his body protested. He was sore all over and he soon found the case an intolerable burden. He wanted to put it somewhere and leave it, but somewhere safe. He'd no intention of throwing something away that had cost so much pain, but the lines were enclosed, partly in tunnels and partly brick sided cutting. Apart from just leaving it at the side of the rails he didn't seem to have a lot of options. If he did end up leaving it he would smash it completely, so there was no chance the man could ever recover it.

When a spur line forked off through a smaller tunnel he decided to follow that for a short way, see if he could get to a house or something to leave the case, and perhaps find something to patch himself up with. As he entered the tunnel he found it blocked. Another smashed train. His heart almost gave out.

He raced to the train, completely oblivious to the pain that caused him, and scrambled in through the first door. It was empty, no bodies. Running to the front he found the cab badly smashed, but no dead driver. The train hadn't hit the stops very hard, and anyone on it had been taken away, or walked away. Then he noticed the bricks on the foot plate and wires on the throttle. This train had been rigged to run without a driver. It had been run into the siding to clear the main track.

Sean almost collapsed with relief, then he glanced at his watch, nearly eight o'clock. Suddenly all his fears returned, and so did the urgency. He dropped the case, which had suddenly become completely irrelevant, and went back to the main line.

Anxiety and fear made Sean want to run, but the sleepers made that difficult. He could have risked a two sleeper step but the pains from his injuries wouldn't allow that. His hourly fear and relief also helped him keep control. The glance at his watch had done the damage, even though he was determined not to look again. It was a few minutes to the hour and he didn't need the watch to see the minute hand in his mind slowly closing on twelve. His steps became slower as the fear increased. At it's height the fear overshadowed everything else, including the pains. Everything became dark, only the ladder like tracks stretching away to the distance visible.

Everything became unreal for a while, then he knew it had passed. He

had to glance at his watch, which confirmed it. Two minutes past. Relief was so powerful that he probably could have run for a while. The evening became quite bright, blue sky with sun somewhere near the horizon. Bushes and weeds at the side of the tracks an incredible green. A beautiful warm August evening. Sean walked for a while at peace with himself and the world. The pains subsided, his mood improved and in a way he began to enjoy his walk, until he unconsciously glanced at his watch again. The hand was now going uphill again, and his unease started to build, only to abate as the hand again past the hour.

In this variable trance state he cleared the city without even realising it. His first inkling came just after nine. His eyes once again began to take things in, and the first thing he noticed was that lines had risen above the surrounding country and there were fields either side.

Animals in the fields greatly enhanced his temporary feeling of well being. They were cattle and horses, feeding as they always had. Things were normal to them, nothing had changed. This instantly put doubts in Sean's mind. This could all be a nightmare, one he'd wake up from. He didn't for one second believe that, but his mind insisted on keeping the doubts. It needed doubts to stay sane. As long as there were doubts it could continue functioning till some way out of the situation presented itself. Sean knew the truth, but defensive mechanisms evolved over millions of years could not be completely overridden by reasoning.

Slowly Sean's fears subsided. Natural surroundings and tiredness soothing his mind. His next hourly low was not quite as bad, the relief also tempered. He was approaching the level of complete mental exhaustion, the apathy of complete defeat. He'd begun to accept that he wasn't going to find the train today. He had to hope that the children would just stay on the train, sleep there. He also had to sleep, it was getting dark. He'd kill himself trying to walk the tracks at night, or at the very least break a leg, which was just as bad as far as he was concerned.

There had been no sign of life along the railway since Leeds. Signals and switch points were all remotely operated, all the old signal boxes were closed down. Where the tracks were open to surrounding houses only dogs broke the silence, squabbling over food or mates. Nothing gave any indication of people still alive.

He knew there were people about of course. Although the trains had completely stopped now, up till even a few hours ago some railway workers had been operating. It was strange how people continued working, even he had, when it was obviously pointless. They had nothing else to do except sit and wait for death. Things were shutting down fast now though. The large organisations had long gone, but those that could be kept running by a few had hung on so long as there were enough people. This seemed to be the point at which the numbers were so low that virtually nothing functioned.

Now the tracks were mostly out in the open, and small towns and villages could be seen in the distance. Nothing seemed to move in any of them. At least on the tracks there were no bodies, which he found somehow

comforting. His mind could deny reality for a while, and although feeling incredibly lonely and frustrated his spirit could recover just a little.

As darkness proper fell he left the railway. He could make out houses not far away in the gloom, and headed for what appeared to be a small village. There were only a handful of houses, none with lights, or showing any other sign of life. The first house he came to was a bungalow, fairly new but built of old stone. The door wasn't locked, and he entered, feeling his way round the large front room. On the fireplace were some matches, and the light from one of these revealed ornate candles either side. These he lit and took one to explore.

It was a very clean smart modern house, well stocked with cans of food, and thankfully no bodies, or worse. Whoever had lived here had not been at home when they went off. They might even still be alive, having gone to relatives or friends. Out in the wilds was not the place to be when all services collapsed.

Sean was too tired to think about food, so on finding the beds already made he dropped on one and virtually passed out.

He rose at first light, not feeling at all refreshed. His body was just a mass of aches and pains. His shins were just a mass of sores, raw and very painful. Only the urgency of his mission gave him the strength to move at all. He found some tins of food, and ate a can of beans, then limped out of the house.

There were horses in the fields opposite, and a farm a little further down the road. Travel by horse probably wouldn't be much easier than on foot, but it would be far quicker than limping along. He was almost crippled. He cautiously entered the farm, being wary of any dogs still guarding the place. Fortunately they'd all gone, probably left in search of food. The farm house was empty, but as he was looking round for saddles he came across large bags of dog food. He took the bags outside and slashed them open. There was no point wasting the food when there were millions of starving dogs around. It might also prevent them from feasting on dead humans, a bad habit to get into as far as the living ones were concerned.

He found saddles and bridals easily enough in a large hut near the stables. Getting a horse into the stables proved a lot harder. It took him hours to get a horse in and saddled, he hadn't done that since he was a child, and then only once on a riding holiday. Fortunately he'd picked a quiet horse and after a very uncertain start he soon regained his confidence. Carefully guiding the horse back to the railway he resumed his quest.

A very long, tiring and uneventful day followed. It would have been pleasant if grief and the urgency of finding his children hadn't flattened his spirits. His hourly cycles continued, but at a much reduced level, even on occasion missing an hour when he was too distracted to look at his watch. The countryside was beautiful and the silence here didn't seem so out of place and menacing as it did in towns. He did come across packs of dogs, usually only two or three dogs of various shapes and sizes. They weren't aggressive towards him, being more interested in finding food and often following him

for some distance in the hopes he'd provide some. They were ill equipped to feed themselves, and he felt sorry for them all. He took to entering almost any house he passed, scattering any food humans couldn't use for the dogs. Some did try to follow him for a while but most stayed with the food.

As the sun fell in the west once again he'd reached the outskirts of York. He had to rest again. His injuries, although healing, were taking their toll. He also had the horse to think of. It would need rest and feed. A lone house near the tracks, with fields all round for the horse seemed perfect. He carefully walked to the front door after leaving the horse on the small road that crossed the tracks. There was no answer to his knock so he tried the door, locked. This was a problem. He stood back and shouted, scanning the nearby fields. There was no response. He was reluctant to break in, it might still be someone's home, out shopping or something.

After some minutes thought he decided he had no choice. If someone did turn up he'd worry about it then. He walked round till he found an open window and climbed in, feeling that the less damage he did the easier to explain. As soon as he entered he knew his fears were unfounded. On the kitchen floor lay a several day old corpse, an old man. The shock and stink almost caused him to throw up. He quickly ran out to get air, leaving the door open.

When he calmed he noticed the garden shed, and despite his tiredness went to it and got a spade. He immediately set about digging a grave in the garden. After dragging the body to his shallow grave and covering it with soil he went to the front to release the horse into a field, then went back to find food and lights while he could still see.

This house had a gas stove, which still functioned, a tank somewhere providing fuel. A few cans and some imagination were quickly converted into a real meal. He left the washing up for someone else, and passed out on the bed immediately after eating.

That night proved to be a very good one as far as sleep went. He slept very late, almost feeling alive next morning, which was a major improvement. He didn't get much chance to savour his feeling of well being, a glance at his watch quickly brought him to Earth. The cycles were still there, and so was the urgency of his task.

He left the horse to feed and set out on foot to mark his path, try to figure out which lines continued on towards the coast. Because he would be in the city centre he felt the horse would be a problem. He also intended to try to find people, see if anyone had any information, and he needed to talk to someone, anyone, about almost anything. Just hearing a human voice would break the loneliness a little.

Leaving the tracks at the deserted station he headed towards the cathedral. Any hope at relief from the city was dashed instantly. Bodies littered the streets, along with vehicles and rubbish. The stink was overwhelming, some of the bodies looked several days old. Holding his nose he pressed on to the cathedral.

Much to his relief there were people there, and they'd cleared the

immediate area, or kept it clear. As he walked to them there was a subdued greeting, but no real welcome. None of the warmth he'd actually expected, and felt towards them. They were wary in some way, suspicious of him perhaps. About a dozen were scattered on the grass in two's and three's all watching as he approached the nearest pair.

Because of their restrained reception he decided against friendly small talk and acted very business like. "Hello, I've been trying to follow a train, it would have come through here two days ago, probably about this time. My children were on it. I wondered if you knew anything about it, or where my children might have gone."

The man he'd spoken to turned to the others. Although they were a little scattered something gave him the impression that they were all together.

"Anyone know anything about a train that came through two days ago?"

No one spoke, all shaking their heads.

"We're mostly from out of town," said the man, not very sympathetically. He was also very business like. "We are on our way to the coast, just passing through. I haven't heard any trains for several days. I'm surprised they were still running two days ago."

"That might have been the last train out this way. It was on a short run but the driver went off and they diverted it this way. They said it would head for the coast till it ran out of fuel."

"Sorry, I can't help you. We're going that way but following the roads. You can come with us if you like, maybe they got there."

"Thanks but no, I have to follow the tracks, find the train if it did stop somewhere. What are you all going to the coast for?"

The man suddenly looked suspicious, and was very careful with his answer. "We've all got an urge to go there. We've nothing else to do. If all those living get together maybe a cure can be found or something. Anything is better than staying where we were and dying as the last person in that area. It's very lonely for those still alive."

"Yes, I'd noticed," replied Sean. "Are there any locals inside?" he asked, gesturing at the church.

"None that could tell you anything, that's why we're out here. Whoever was collecting the victims put them in there, but we've been here an hour and haven't seen anyone. I think any locals have left the city, it seems to be deserted."

"Thanks." said Sean, lowering his head and turning away. These people were of no use to him. He was wasting time here, needed to get back to the railway.

A black cloud seemed to follow him as he moved through the narrow streets. The bodies he hardly noticed, worry about his children, and himself because the clocks were going uphill, completely overshadowed any other consideration. He wasn't going to find the children again today, his third day. He was beginning to think he'd never find them. Each day reduced his chances drastically. As he came to the station he could almost see them huddled

somewhere, afraid and cold.

Panic made him set off up the tracks towards the coast. Once the hour had been passed he calmed a little. Rob was clever, he'd look after Sue. He'd find somewhere to sleep and eat. He'd then follow the tracks back, try to get home. Sean would probably run into them soon. This was all Sean could think, anything else was unacceptable.

He walked along the tracks until he cleared the city, and there ahead on the line was a two carriage commuter diesel. He sprinted to it. The driver was still in his seat, slumped over his panel, dead. Several people were in the carriages, some sitting some on the floor. One was still breathing, but not alive. This was the train, Sean was certain. he searched around for signs as to where the passengers may have gone, but found none. They'd followed the tracks one way or the other. If they'd moved into York they could be anywhere, he might never find them, but if they'd continued towards the coast he might have a chance. He began running back down the tracks to get his horse.

Although he started out running beside the tracks when he could, he soon realised that getting the horse would take some time. He'd walked much further than he'd realised, and now found himself split between getting the horse or just continuing up the lines on foot. His progress quickly slowed when the euphoria of finding the train wore off, every muscle and joint hurt. He hadn't recovered from his injuries in Leeds, and his body was protesting about what it was being made to do. The pains settled the debate. In his present state he'd be lucky to last out the day walking, but those on the train would have been fresh and had a two day start. He needed the horse to have any chance at all of catching them.

He kept his eyes peeled as he struggled along the tracks for other horses. He did see one, but it was a long way off and there were no buildings near that might have had saddles. He'd no chance whatever of riding bareback. He soon found himself back among the buildings, and concentrated on making the best time he could.

Collecting the horse and saddling it took hours. By the time he got moving again it was late afternoon. He reached the stranded train at seven o'clock, and had to pause for a while. For some reason that particular hourly fright was a strong one, renewing all his fears. He only managed a few more miles before it began to get dark, and he had to once again leave the tracks to find shelter for the night.

A few scattered houses on a small road only a few hundred yards from the railway appeared from the gloom. There was a fenced field just across the road from the first house, so he chose that. It looked like an old farmhouse, in fact the whole village looked like it had once been a large farm. All the houses looked very old, but probably weren't. Neat gardens and large garages suggested affluence. The old farm buildings converted into country retreats for the well off.

Knocking on the door was a habit, and always wise anyway. There

was always the chance of people still here no matter how remote. When the door opened he stepped back in shock. In the gloom he could just make out the face of a woman, probably in her fifties. Her face blocked the partially open door.

"What do you want?" Her voice was nervous, she was obviously frightened, which wasn't really surprising under the circumstances. Sean hesitated some time to collect his thoughts. He hadn't prepared for this situation. He decided a quick explanation was probably best to put her at ease, in case she had a gun or something.

"I've been following a train that my children were on. It ran out of fuel a few miles back and I'm continuing along the tracks in hopes of catching them up. I was just looking for somewhere to sleep and eat before going on in the morning. I expected the house to be empty. I'm sorry for bothering you. I'll use another, if you know which are empty."

She looked greatly relieved at his explanation and manner, and stared at him with a frown on her face.

"They're all empty, last of them went yesterday morning, but I have room and food. You can stay here if you like. I can tell you something about the people from that train, they came through here." As she spoke she opened the door fully. She was only small, dressed a little young in 'T' shirt and jeans. Sean's heart was suddenly in his throat. This was the first good sign he'd had, the only sign. He became excited and could hardly get his question out.

"Were two children with them?"

"Yes, a young boy and girl, both about ten."

Sean's heart threatened to burst out of his chest, but he had to be certain.

"They're names were Rob and Sue!" he stammered, hardly daring to hope for a positive answer.

"Yes, that was them."

"Were they all right? Where did they go?" He was now so excited he was ready to start running after them. At last it seemed he was getting near.

"I'm not sure where they went but they were all right, being looked after by a young couple. It would be more comfortable inside than stood in the door, and your horse needs taking care of. You can't do anything till tomorrow, so you see to the horse and I'll make some food."

Sean didn't know whether to throttle her to tell more or kiss her for what she'd said so far. Her voice held authority though, and in his confused state he obeyed without too much thought, and quickly took off the saddle and bridle and put the horse in the field. He ran back to the house. The woman had cooked some eggs and bacon, along with some slightly stale bread. She gestured Sean to one side of the table then sat at the other and began eating. It was obvious she didn't want to talk until after the meal, so Sean stuffed the lot down in seconds.

She noted with some distaste his lack of manners and eager stare as soon as he'd finished. She ate a little more slowly, but still finished quickly, then got up and went to the lounge. All rooms were lighted by candles, and she

had an open wood fire burning. She sat in a chair beside the fire and Sean sat on the edge of one the other side.

"They came here day before yesterday, in the afternoon," she began, reaching for a bottle of wine and pouring a glass. This she passed to Sean and filled another for herself. "There were about thirty altogether from the train. Four of them went off at three o'clock, we were already busy burying two of our own from that morning. The sixteen left from the village had already decided to move on to the coast, and most of those from the train decided to go with them. Most left as soon as the latest victims were taken care of." A catch in her voice as she said that suggested the latest victims from the village were more than just neighbours

"About twelve of those from the train said they were going to try to get home, the couple taking care of the children were among those. Whether they were taking the children to the couples home or their own I never thought to ask, but as they were all on the same train I automatically assumed they were from the same place."

"Did they say what their names were?"

"Possibly, but I don't remember. I spoke to most of them and we all exchanged names but I can't remember any of them, there were just too many."

"I aught to go now, get back as quickly as possible. Our house is burnt down, there's nothing there if they go back, and I didn't tell anyone what I was doing. There was no one to tell."

Sean was almost in tears. He'd screwed everything up. If he'd left the house in tact he could have left a note or something. Now, if they got back what would they do. Go to dad,s. He'd be gone by now, but at least the house would be in tact. Maybe they'd stay there a while. If Sean had been thinking he should have gone back and left a note there.

He cringed at the thought of the children reaching their grandfathers house and finding him dead or a cabbage. They'd be terrified and completely lost. Sean hadn't even bothered to go back and tell him he was following the train.

"It's pitch black out there, you'd have a job travelling in the dark, and the horse needs time to rest and feed." She obviously didn't want Sean to leave, and despite his near panic again he recognised the plea in her voice, but there was nothing he could do, he had to go.

"Is there somewhere I can get a motorbike, I could be there in a few hours."

"Not round here that I know of. Back in York maybe. I still think you'd be wise to wait till it gets light. It's very dangerous travelling in the dark, that's why I'm waiting till morning before I set off for the coast."

"Why didn't you go with the others?"

"We didn't intend to go. We were going to stay here, but John, my husband, was taken that morning the train people came. I wasn't ready to go when the rest went. I intended to stay here with him, but one night alone changed my mind. The village was completely empty last night, apart from me."

"I'm sorry, but I have to go now. I can walk back down the tracks, I'll leave the horse here. You can use it to get to the coast. Thank you for the meal and everything else and I really am sorry I can't stay. If you should see the children again tell them to get to the coast, everyone else seems to be going there, and I'll find them. Tell them not to come looking for me no matter what."

The woman sighed, finally accepting that he was going and she'd have to spend the rest of the night alone. Still at least she wouldn't have to walk in the morning. "I will, and good luck."

Sean almost sprinted back to York in the summer darkness. Danger and pain no longer affected him. The children were safe, being looked after, that's all that mattered. He had another chance to help them, and he had to do better than he had so far.

By the time he got into the city the sky was lightening, enough that he could search for transport. Motorbikes seemed to be a rare commodity, he wasn't the only one to think of them, but there far more motorcycles than people so it didn't take too long to find one. He managed to get round all the blockages in town and onto the main road west. Although he had to leave it and take to the fields quite often he still got back to his fathers before mid day. His father was still sat in his chair, staring at the clock through unseeing eyes. Even though Sean had expected this the sight stunned him. In his thoughtless panic he was letting everybody down. It would have made no difference if he'd stayed a little while with his father. It would have made no difference if he'd stayed with the woman till this morning. In fact it would have made no difference to anything if he'd just stayed at home and buried Tanya properly, so at least he and the children would have a grave to visit. As it was he had nothing of her to remember. He'd burnt all their possessions, photographs, mementoes, everything. It would have been much better if he had taken the tablets and joined her. At least the kids would have had something to remember their past by, and their mother.

With tears streaming down his face Sean dug a hole in the back garden and buried his father. After he'd done he left notes all over the house, even on the walls in black marker in case the children should get there. Then he made his way back home, a little more cautiously than when he'd left.

The town was a shambles. There were no people at all, at least on the streets. His house was just a shell, as were all the other houses in the terrace. He could find no sign that anyone had been there. He had to assume the young couple or even the kids themselves would have more sense than him and leave some sign or note. He was quite sure they hadn't been there, which could mean it was taking them some time to get here or the couple had decided to keep the kids. The other obvious possibilities he didn't even care to consider.

He moved in the house opposite to wait, and heal himself. Further plans weren't possible yet. He made placards and nailed them to posts in the front and rear of his old house. Then went into town, collected some supplies and settled down feeling more hopeful than he had since Tanya died.

After about a week he felt fully fit and well, and decided to make his

search active. Thinking about what the woman had said put it into his mind that the couple may be living somewhere near. They were on the same train. Perhaps they'd come here, seen the house and assumed the worst. They could be in the next street or maybe just outside town.

He walked around the general area visiting the houses of anyone he or his wife had known. All were empty, everyone had gone. There were signs that people had been in the town centre, the most obvious being a new victim stood near the library. Sean guided the old man into one of the shops and left him there.

All the shops were either open or had been broken into. There wasn't much of use in most. Sean had already equipped the house he was using with battery lights, gas camping cooker and heaters. He had numerous pairs of walking shoes and enough clothing to take on the Arctic. Food wasn't a problem, so long as you liked it dried or from cans. All he missed were people. It was likely that people were passing through town quite often. Holed up in the estate he'd missed them all, so he decided to make one of the buildings near the bridge a second home, spend the day there, or even move in permanently and leave notes at the old house. He chose an office building right at the bridge and took a camping stove and some food in for his dinner. As he settled down to eat a shot rang out very near. He rushed to the window and there on the bridge were six soldiers. They were heaving a body over the wall into the river.

His first elation at seeing live people was instantly crushed by what they were doing. Just tossing the body into the river seemed totally inappropriate. Shooting victims also seemed wrong, assuming it was a victim. He'd automatically assumed they were cleaning up the town, but there was only one live victim there, and that wasn't what had gone into the river. Sean was about to go down and protest about the methods they were using when a group of people came into view being walked over the bridge by several more soldiers. The civilians didn't look happy or willing, they looked more like prisoners. Was the army rounding up looters? As far as Sean was concerned there was no such thing. Everything in the shops and factories would just rot. It was anybody's for the taking. Better to make use of everything than just let it go to waste.

Would they consider him a looter. His clothes, food, every thing he had was taken from shops. He decided to stay out of sight. He didn't need anything from the army. He couldn't see what they were protecting. People didn't need protection. The only animals that could be dangerous were the dogs, and so far all he'd seen were not at all aggressive to humans. They were all just lost and hungry. If they were protecting property then who for? This didn't make any sense, and Sean decided he'd best avoid these soldiers. He kept low and watched them walk along the old road away from town. All except two. They were left on the bridge, and when the others were gone moved into the same block of offices he was in.

Sean had a serious problem. The two soldiers were on the ground floor in the reception area. He couldn't get out without passing them. Even if

he managed to jump from one of the upper windows without killing himself he'd have a hard time going anywhere without being seen. He would have to wait here until they left, and just hope they didn't search the place.

It was beginning to get dark and Sean had almost fallen asleep when shouting roused him. He crawled to his window but could see nothing on the bridge. Voices could be heard, they were outside the building, so Sean decided to risk sneaking down the stairs. The reception area was empty, so he crept towards the glass doors. Outside near the bridge the soldiers were talking to two people, a young man and woman. They actually seemed to be arguing, and both soldiers were pointing their guns at them.

It wasn't really dark enough for Sean to slip away, the soldiers were only thirty or so metres away, and there was no cover for almost two hundred metres. He glanced round the reception area perhaps for another way out. There was a back door, but he also saw the soldiers packs, both open and partly unpacked. He couldn't help the couple, but he could cause these two some inconvenience. He grabbed both packs and moved quietly through the back door. He was in the car park near the river, and ran as silently as he could along the river away from the building, keeping it between himself and the others. He kept going for about a mile then crossed to the railway lines and made his way back to his house.

The house was empty, he'd half expected the children there waiting for him. He'd hoped that the young couple stopped by the soldiers were the ones looking after his children, and had returned them home. However someone had been there. The door was broken. Dirty footprints told him who, soldiers. They were waiting at the bridge for him, because that was the only path across the river. There were dozens of ways out of town away from the river, but if you only had a few men then the bridge was the best place to put them, it covered entry from half the area, anywhere north of the river.

Sean immediately moved to another house and made sure all the windows were blacked out before he lit his lantern and sat down to think. They would come back, especially now he'd taken their packs. He'd have to leave, head for the coast. He found himself shaking at what he'd got himself into. What possessed him to take the packs? It wouldn't help the couple, and now they'd be hunting him.

He looked in the packs for anything useful, the first things he saw were night vision goggles. He put a pair on but could see nothing through them. The rest of the equipment was ammunition, clothing etc. The cooking gear and any food had been unpacked, and was still in the reception area. He kept the goggles but stuffed the packs into the loft. It would take a very thorough search of the town to find them. Then he loaded his own pack, including one pair of goggles. He turned out his light and went to the window, he pulled the curtains aside, put on the other goggles and switched them on. It was daylight in black and white, and almost in negative. He went outside carefully and began moving towards the town centre and river just beyond.

He had to find out what these soldiers were doing. If they were rounding people up then they may well have his children somewhere. He had

to know where they were taking people. These night glasses meant he should be able to see what they were doing without being seen himself. If they'd already crossed over he might be able to follow them. As he came in sight of the bridge he saw four white shapes there. Through the goggles people stood out like candles.

He couldn't go any nearer, he'd be out in the open. They might have good night vision and see him. If they stayed there all night he'd have to hide again during the day and he might lose them, or they find him. His only other option was to get to the other side of the river, find a good vantage point and wait for them to pass. Not a great option. He figured that it would be well over fifteen kilometres to get to the other side of this bridge.

After waiting about an hour he decided the other bridges were his only option. He set off towards the first bridge a few kilometres upstream. After that he had another bridge to cross several kilometres further because the river split into two. He wasn't going to be at the other side till tomorrow afternoon.

Daylight found Sean crossing the second river at a footbridge he'd forgotten about till well on the way. He only had three or four kilometres still to do. He decided not to follow the river back but to cut straight across to the old road and try to intercept them. When he reached the road he carefully made his way back towards town. He saw no sign of them, and even crossed the bridge. In the reception room were the soldiers uniforms, but no sign of them or the couple. He could make nothing from the uniforms, so he had to assume they'd set off after the others early, and he'd missed them. He immediately re-crossed the river and set off up the old road.

Five kilometres or so from town there was an old colliery building, it was on fire, at least smoke was rising from it. Sean approached it carefully, keeping close to the hedge. As he got near he could see a large part of the red brick building had been demolished, smoke and flames billowing from the remaining standing parts. There seemed to be no one about and Sean cautiously walked up to it. He could see bodies in the rubble, one in an army uniform. He began to move nearer when a shout behind made him spin round. Standing near the door to one of the nearby houses was another soldier. He was staggering from side to side waving a large tube at Sean. Sean instantly decided that the man was drunk. He never got chance to evaluate the tube because a loud shriek and bang sent him to the ground. The tube was a rocket launcher of some kind, the shriek a missile firing and the bang an explosion somewhere behind him.

Sean was shaking like a leaf, the man had fired a rocket at him. He looked up and the man was still wobbling all over, but he was also trying to load another rocket. Sean panicked. He jumped up and ran at the man. He swung his fist as hard as he could when he reached him. The blow and Sean's momentum knocked the man over, Sean hitting the floor a few feet away. As Sean got to his hands and knees he saw that the man wasn't even stunned. He was fumbling at a belt holster, trying to get his gun out. Sean dived on him and punched him in the face as hard as he could. He hurt his fist but had virtually

no effect on the drunken soldier, who was struggling wildly under Sean's weight. He swung again but still no effect, and he almost had the gun out. Sean tried to grab his hand but he was wriggling about too much. Then Sean noticed the brick border edging the path they were fighting on. He grabbed a building brick which came up easily, and then slammed it down on the soldiers forehead. Still he struggled, and the gun was out. Sean put both hands to the brick and slammed it against his head for all he was worth, again and again.

Sean's hands were covered in blood, and so was the brick. The soldier was still, his head and face a bloody mess. Sean was panting and soaked in sweat, and as realisation sank in that the soldier was dead Sean began to shake violently. He rolled off the body and was violently sick, coughing and retching for minutes.

Sean had nearly died, first from a rocket and then a gun. If the soldier hadn't been so drunk he'd have won the fight as well, but he'd been too crazy to fight. He'd died trying to get a gun out he didn't need. Sean had hit him for all he was worth and had merely hurt his fist. If the soldier had hit him back he'd probably have knocked Sean out. That was the first fight Sean had been in since childhood, and by far worse than he remembered, or imagined.

After a while he pulled himself together and moved away from the body. He looked around anxiously but was weak and still shaking. If there were any more he was dead. He saw no one, and went into the house to sit and calm himself. The first room was the kitchen, and he sat at the table. Opposite he saw the source of the soldiers drink, an open cupboard full of bottles of whiskey. He went over, opened a bottle and took a drink. It burnt his throat, but did seem to calm him a little.

After several more drinks he went back outside to the pile of rubble. As he looked carefully he saw a woman's leg, and more bits of uniform. He pulled some rubble down revealing more bodies. There had been a lot of people either in the building or near it when it had been destroyed. He could only guess that the soldier had gone mad and fired rockets at these while still sober. Sean knew there could be no survivors.

He thought about digging through the pile to check if his children were among them, but decided they couldn't be. Even accepting the possibility would have destroyed him, let alone actually finding them. He pulled a rifle from the rubble that looked undamaged. A pack nearby provided ammunition. He'd decided that fighting wasn't his thing, he needed weapons. He went back to the body he'd made and took his belt and pistol. He looked at the tube and rockets on the ground but decided against taking it. It was too big and he'd no idea on how to use it. He threw it into some bushes.

Now he needed a horse. Walking with a pack wasn't his thing either. He couldn't live in town any more with gangs of soldiers wondering around, but he couldn't leave till he was certain the children weren't going to turn up. He'd find somewhere safe and make regular trips to the house.

As he started back towards town he almost cried. This disease had killed almost everybody, but still some weren't satisfied. Someone was still playing power games, sending armed soldiers out to round up the people. Still,

a few more episodes like the one back there and maybe they'd learn, or more hopefully get dead and leave any survivors to start again. There were twenty or thirty people back there who would all be alive if no one had been armed. Maybe some or all were immune to the disease, but no one was immune to bullets, or rockets.

In this world where everyone is spied on, firstly by neighbours, local councils, companies, police and governments through their secret services paranoia would be understandable for most people. Those at the top and in the security services make normal paranoia seem like apathy.

Chapter 4

When Actin proposed using force to bring everyone the army could find into town there was little dissent, Chantry had made sure of that. Most of 'his lieutenants' were ex secret service anyway, they were fully aware of the emergency transmitters and their limitations. He'd kept out of what argument there was, taking the opportunity to study them all. He couldn't clear the psychic disturbance from his mind. There'd been no sign of it when he woke, and in a way that worried him even more than it's appearance the day before had.

He decided to confine himself to the ship. He couldn't help feeling that something was going on outside, that some one was probing their psychic powers, in a way that only the elite had ever been trained to do. It was possible Chantry had a rival, who was not fully trained. Use of psychic power without restraint was a threat to everyone, that's why Chantry and his peers had ruthlessly suppressed any knowledge of such things in the general population.

He'd watch his lieutenants very carefully for signs of control other than his. He'd be here, on the ship with the technology, when this other turned up. Psychic power reduced the more that had it, down to virtually nothing if everyone had it. It was like gold, only valuable to control people if you had it and they didn't. There had been several hundred elite, sharing between them complete power over every other person on the planet. Chantry had ruled millions, now he was down to thousands. He'd no intention of sharing that power. Rogue or surviving elite didn't matter, he had the ship, and therefore the power.

A slight itch on his side from his pager warned of someone trying to make contact through direct link. He hurriedly excused himself and went to his cabin. The communication was coming in through an old secret service waveband, not used at all for months, and rarely used before that. This was the only direct link allowed to the individual cells, and could only be used in an emergency. That any cell was still operating was a complete surprise.

Chantry quickly put on a rubber mask before allowing the visual communication. A young and very frightened man appeared on his screen. He looked near to panic, so Chantry assumed the confident and strict commander role.

"Identify and report!" he ordered calmly, although inside he was almost jumping for joy. If there were still cells operating he had far more power than he'd thought. He knew all the control signals to make the cells do almost anything. The fact he didn't have direct contact with any needn't necessarily inhibit his use of them.

The man stammered some name very quietly, as though he were hiding. The link wasn't perfect either. He was using a briefcase transmitter, which meant he was not more than sixty miles or so away.

"You're not coming through very clear. Make your report, but speak louder if you can."

"I'm from three five seven rogue control cell. We lost power so I switched to batteries but some turned on me. I've lost track of them but I'm sure they're hunting me."

A rogue control cell, and he'd lost control of his rogues which meant some were still alive. Worse still they were not only alive but after an agent. The order was sent to kill all rogues, this fool must have disobeyed, left his rogues alive. Chantry lost control.

"You left rogues alive, are you completely insane. Do you know what you've done, what damage you've caused. Can't you understand orders." He wanted to throttle the man, was tempted to plant his fist in the monitor screen. He gripped the edge of the table and came closer to the screen to emphasize his words, make them more cutting but the man had moved away from the camera.

"Get back here I haven't finished yet!" he shouted. He saw a flash of movement just on the edge of the screen, then nothing but a pile of rubble. "Get back here!" he screamed, but nothing happened. He waited and listened, fuming, building up a tirade that would burn the man's ears off when he did re-appear

He sat watching the screen for several minutes, then movement, the man came back. Chantry's throat blocked his words before they left his mouth, it wasn't the same man. Someone else was staring into the camera, no they were staring at Chantry on the screen. His hand almost smashed the switch off. They'd caught the agent, and knew he had superiors still alive.

This was a disaster to rival the virus itself. Someone was hunting them, the agents, and now the elite, him. He found himself shaking uncontrollably He almost threw up as his mind realised that it was rogues doing the hunting. A cell could be responsible for dozens of rogues, how many had survived?

He suddenly felt very lonely and afraid. His hands were shaking uncontrollably Rogues were hunting for him, and he'd no idea how many. These were rogues that had been controlled, with torture and drugs and all the other tools. They would be out for vengeance, especially against those in charge. They would have some knowledge of the technologies used against them. They might have knowledge of the organisation, or they could know almost anything depending on how much they'd developed.

Chantry's cabin suddenly began to resemble a prison cell. He was

trapped here, couldn't move. He couldn't strike at his enemies, they were out of range. While he sat here they had complete freedom of movement. He felt cold, a trapped animal, or condemned man. He smashed his fist into the table in front of the blank monitor. He wasn't finished yet. He had the ship, his little army. They had nothing but an agent and his tools, primitive tools compared to those on this ship. The agent knew nothing.

Chantry took deep breaths to calm himself. He'd almost panicked for no reason. They couldn't harm him, couldn't even find him. No one knew Chantry was an elite, at least no one left alive. No direct connection existed between Chantry and any agent, it never had. He'd always been remote, safe, like all the elite.

Isolation did not suit Chantry. He needed others around him, not close emotionally just their presence. He felt safe in crowds, not as one of them, but as a superior among them. He decided to go back to the meeting on the bridge but closing his little alcove took some effort, his hands wouldn't stop shaking. He'd never been under threat in his life before.

As he entered the bridge he scanned all the smug, superior faces. A new thought occurred to him. Could one of these be an elite. He'd been seriously thinking that it was time to have them elect him leader. That would flush out any other elite. Problem was he couldn't, not now he knew rogues would be searching for them. Had this been planned, set-up just to prevent him becoming leader. It made sense, and wouldn't be hard to do. That would mean there were no rogues.

This kind of confusion with many questions and no definite answers was exactly what they used against peasants who began to suspect anything. Confuse them, keep them guessing but never sure. Chantry cringed at that thought. He was becoming more convinced every minute that he wasn't alone, wasn't in charge. That he was just another peasant to a higher elite.

Chantry was in grave danger of becoming depressed and paranoid. He had to get control of himself. The others were ignoring him, discussing something trivial so he slipped from the room and went back to his cabin. He felt very lonely and vulnerable. He needed help, but there was none, so he'd have to make some. He pulled out his secret monitor and began searching the town for any rogue children. A number had been brought here but he didn't know who they were. Everyone was equally suppressed. He'd have to listen to them, wait for clues from their past. They'd be loners, shy, that would have been part of their conditioning. He'd just study all the likely candidates.

For almost two weeks Chantry spent every waking moment spying on the children in town. He felt sure he'd identified several rogues, and was now trying to devise tests so he could be certain. A knock on his cabin door disturbed his work.

"What is it?" he shouted. The others had more or less left him alone after he'd told them he was ill. They were quite happy running everything with one less tribune. Usually when they did disturb him it was to make sure he hadn't gone off.

"We have a problem that requires all of us. If you are at all well enough you should join us. We've lost contact with one of our patrols. They had about a dozen people they were bringing in but didn't report in last night, or this morning, and it was a double patrol, ten men."

"I'll support whatever the majority decides to do, but I still feel a little unwell. I'll take another days rest and rejoin you tomorrow."

Footsteps moved away from his door and climbed the steps. Chantry turned his attention back to the task in hand, then checked himself. The ordinary soldiers were of little concern but two of them would have been 'officers' picked by him personally. If there were rogues out there, and they'd managed to capture a double patrol they could learn all kinds of things, worst of all they'd get the name Chantry as someone in charge. The one who chose officers.

His mind began to go in circles again. He'd made the suggestion that he should take personal charge of the army, and insured they accepted it. Had he outsmarted himself, or had someone else outsmarted him, made him the target. His thoughts instantly began going through all the other enigma's, completely distracting him. He couldn't possibly concentrate on what he had to do. He pushed his monitor away and sealed the cubicle, then went to join the meeting.

Tribune Moran rushed over to him, feigning concern about his health and pleasure at his presence.

"It's good to see you up again tribune chantry."

The words were completely cold and meaningless. He was a primitive, totally unable to act. He wouldn't have fooled a child.

"Thank you, although I'm still a little shaky. What's this about patrols going missing.

"A double patrol, about seventy miles out. They were on the way back after collecting twelve people. They reported departing a town on the Aire yesterday morning, but leaving two soldiers behind to collect a straggler in the area they'd found signs of. That's the last we heard from them."

"Radio failure?" asked, or suggested Chantry.

"Unlikely. Each patrol has a spare radio, which means they had four with them, and all the relay stations are functioning. They should also have contacted one of our outer sweep patrols near York last night. They've obviously run into some trouble."

"Has any other patrol been sent to see?"

"That's why we wanted you here. We can't decide, and you being the military expert we needed your input."

"That seems the obvious thing to do," stated Chantry.

"Some of us feel that perhaps they've been attacked. They were heavily armed, even had a rocket launcher with them. If that's now in someone else's hands it could be very dangerous sending others. It may also be wise to think about ourselves, if there are others with arms wondering about."

Most of the others had now gathered around, Actin joined the discussion.

"The general opinion seems to be that we should pull in the patrols, not send out these long range ones. We lose direct radio contact after about forty miles, and have to rely on the relay stations which can only be used for a few minutes a day. If we kept the patrols within direct range they could report more often, keep in constant touch."

Chantry almost smiled, they were panicking, over reacting drastically. Then his mood turned blacker. Actin had suggested this, did he know something. Images of the man's face in the suitcase camera also sprung into his mind. Had these rogues become strong enough to take on armed patrols. First an agent, now ten of their soldiers. What games were going on here. Was he being set up. The affair with the agent had told them he had superiors he was reporting to. These soldiers could give them Chantry's name, and where he was. There could be dozens of armed rogues looking for their tormentors, and they'd have Chantry as a name to aim at.

Chantry knew all about scape goats and the uses to which they could be put. If someone in this group were an elite he could sacrifice Chantry to these rogues, claim to have been misled by Chantry and then take over later when suspicions died down. Chantry had brought all the technology on this ship that they used to control the townspeople, he was the expert in mind control and the military. Many of the suppressed rogues knew there was an elite in control, they just didn't know who they were. It wouldn't take a mental giant to put everything together and come up with Chantry as one of them. If they believed him to be the last the field would be wide open once he'd gone.

"What do you think Tribune Chantry?" asked Actin, breaking his thoughts.

"You're probably right, bring the patrols in to direct communication range. I must go and rest again, I'm not quite as well as I thought."

"You look a little pale, is there anything we can do?" asked Actin, far more convincingly than Moran. In fact he sounded sincere, which Chantry instantly dismissed as good acting.

"No, I just need a little more rest. I'll be all right tomorrow."

He withdrew to his cabin, and once behind the closed door cursed vehemently. He was being manipulated and out manoeuvred at every turn. He was trapped, or was he. Could he turn this around somehow. The patrol commanders were his, he could tell them anything without the others knowing. He could even tell them part of the truth. They already knew people were being confined to town for more than just their own good, and guided there by the transmission from emergency transmitters. If he told them some of the truth, taught them just a little of psychic power, promised them real power when this was over, they'd support him totally. That should take care of any rogues trying to come here. He may also be able to use them to flush out the other elite.

He instantly sat in his chair and began deep relaxation to clear his mind for contact with whatever patrol leaders were in town. The sooner he started the better.

Mind control started just after world war two in the U.S.A. where most of the German scientists ended up. It started out in 1950 as program bluebird but changed to artichoke in 1951 when Britain and Canada were included. MKultra took over in 1953 and was officially closed in 1964. However aspects of the program continued at least till 1973 when virtually all records were destroyed to thwart an expected investigation. What records were overlooked came to light later.

Mind control programs were still in use in the nineties when the role of many psychiatrists in these programs became public knowledge in the USA.

MKultra (Mind Kontrol Ultra).

This is as the name implies a mind control program. In this program the mind is compartmentalised by trauma's and these compartments are then programmed in various ways. Because these compartments can be opened by external stimulæ peoples personality or behaviour can be changed by a word or event. Depending of the level of trauma used and the extent of programming using drugs, hypnosis etc. people may be programmed to do very strange things which they'd be totally unaware of when they returned to 'normal'. Everything they did would be in the compartment in use at the time. People can be given many different personalities, each totally unaware of the others, and each switched on or off by a controller.

How perfectly this works is questionable, but it apparently does work, at least in some people and probably to some extent in all.

Chapter 5

A small estate near the next river bridge from town Sean chose as his next home. It had been a council estate so all the houses were similar, a good place to hide. A farm separated the estate from the river, a farm with horses. Ideal for his purposes.

This position had quite a few advantages for him. It was only a few kilometres from town, within a few minutes walk on roads, railway or along the river. There were several railway bridges over the river nearby, only short distances apart, so he couldn't be trapped if this road bridge were blocked. The road bridge itself carried a major road which anyone avoiding town would probably use.

These precautions were probably unnecessary. It was obvious when he thought about it that those few soldiers couldn't possibly have searched many houses. They'd found him simply because of all the signs he'd left in the street. Problem was he needed to do that, he needed to be easy to find. He hadn't moved the signs, but had placed cb radios in the house with detailed instructions on how to contact him. He could only hope this simple precaution would protect him.

Apart from the search for his children the farm provided his second

quest. Sheep in a field were starving to death. All the grass had been cropped to bare earth. He managed to fuel and start one of the tractors, and went round pulling down every fence or other barrier to movement he could find, releasing the animals to roam at will. Once those in the immediate area were free he moved further afield to other farms. He could only risk taking the noisy tractor a few kilometres, so after two days he left the tractor and took ropes, crow bars hammer and chisels on a horse. This allowed him to go much further, pulling down fences, or if the horse couldn't do it making large gaps in such as steel fences with his tools.

Working hard kept up his spirits. He never fully escaped the hourly cycle of highs and lows, and if anything his watch became more important, but it no longer virtually crippled him for the few minutes around the hour. He even occasionally missed hours, being so involved in something that when he did look at his watch it was already past. His logic said he was immune, safe from the virus, but for some reason he could never convince himself of this. His other path seemed to be that perhaps he'd developed a tolerance for the disease, keeping it at bay for the time being.

He didn't worry about himself much anyway, and after about a week in his new home had his first guests. He'd intended to be very careful about any people he met, checking them out thoroughly before revealing himself. That hadn't worked at all. He'd just come back from a several hour trip along the river to the next road bridge. He was walking the horse back over the bridge near home when six people stepped out from the farm entrance. They were only sixty or seventy metres away and he was out in the open on the bridge. Had they been hostile or armed he'd nowhere to go, and he only had tools with him. He never carried the guns.

They were fortunately friendly. The remains of several families all from one village. Two men, one about thirty the other a little older, and four females, the youngest about seven, next about ten, a woman about thirty and one in her later years. The two young girls were sisters, the rest of their family gone. The two thirty year olds' were man and wife, their children had gone, and they'd adopted the two girls. The other two were just people who'd lived in the same village.

Their story was probably fairly typical. They'd stayed together in the village, taking care of the victims, survivors gathering and living together in an ever reducing number of houses until only twelve were left in one large house. Then the water had begun to turn sour from the mains and they'd moved to a nearby large town. The mains water there was still fresh and they had everything else they needed from the shops and warehouses.

Of course their numbers kept falling, and they also seemed to get an urge to head for the coast. Eight had started out a week ago, two had succumbed. They did impart one piece of strange information. The towns and cities had been hit much quicker than more remote groups. The bigger the town the faster its population had declined. This wasn't a hope of any kind. Villages had been just as badly devastated, it had just taken a little longer. They spent one night with Sean then moved on. He escorted them as far as the

next road bridge, then watched as they started on the road to York. He'd be taking that road soon.

He stayed near town all through August. Several individuals or groups passed through, some through town but most crossing the river at his bridge, missing the town. At first there was someone every few days but the numbers dwindled till during the last week he'd seen no one. This was the point that he also decided to head for the coast. He was getting the impression that he was the only one left inland.

He left notes on the old house as to where he'd gone, then packed bags with his belongings for his journey. No one else he'd spoken to had had any trouble with soldiers, or anyone else. He decided that he'd probably just come across a rogue group, but he packed the weapons anyway and loaded them, along with tents, camping gear, ropes and tools onto a spare horse. He didn't need to carry anything for survival, the supplies left behind would last what few people there were for years. Accommodation wasn't a problem either, but safety might be. If in doubt he'd live in the tent in some hidden meadow or other.

His possessions amounted to clothes, rain gear, torches and batteries. His photographs were all gone, along with everything else in the burnt house. He had no past, and as far as he could see precious little future.

At first he made very good progress, and crossed the Swilington bridge before lunchtime. As he climbed the hill away from the river towards the houses he could see some fields on his left. He left the road and moved into the fields, making gaps or flattening fences altogether. By night he'd barely covered five kilometres.

Next day was even slower. He had to detour further from his route to reach more distant fields. Most didn't have animals but would perhaps help feed some later on. Just now the crops were ripe, but with no one to harvest them they'd probably rot. Better to let the cattle and sheep eat them. The crops might re-seed themselves and maybe even be needed at some time in the future.

He also visited farm houses, scattering any feedstuffs for whatever came along. He was especially sorry for the dogs, and went out of his way to find food for them, raiding shops and dumping all dried food on the floor, fixing the doors open.

Meeting people was something of an event now after a few weeks on the road, there were so few. Even now nearly four months since it started people still went off. There was no immunity, just longer delays. He now had three watches, despite trying to throw his away. He was fascinated by them and had long since accepted that at some point he'd go off. He was just living hour to hour day to day, and generally living more than he ever had. If it hadn't been for worrying about the children he'd actually have been enjoying himself.

He'd taken to wearing a pistol in a holster in the small of his back. There were no laws, and no one to enforce any. What few people were left were all under stress, and some handled it differently than others. Not the normal stress of making a living. There were all the supplies in the world in

deserted shops, supermarkets, garages, factories and warehouses, not to mention ordinary houses. The stress was that of a terminal disease. Many didn't cope well, and some let their baser natures take control. He'd encountered one that he'd never forget, and seen the results of others in various places.

It would have been difficult for anyone following Sean to have figured out where he was heading. He meandered about the country side, tearing down fences, burying any victims he found and feeding the dogs. He generally travelled east but forward progress could sometimes be measured in a few paces. When he reached the motorway north he decided to stay around a few days, see if there were any travellers that way.

Sean was occupying a large house on the edge of a small town beside the motorway, his horse cropping the back lawn. Now mid September the days were shortening, which posed a danger. No power stations still functioned so the towns were dark and silent. Open fires were the best method of heating houses and portable generators the best way to light them. Smell from the smoke and sound from the generator advertised your presence to people miles away.

This was not paranoid thinking. Most people would come just to talk, for company, but his experiences with the soldiers made him wary, now he was away from home in unfamiliar places. He'd started taking elaborate precautions, not staying in one house more than a few days, using portable gas heaters for cooking and heating, using battery lights and making sure all windows were covered. The horses meant he could come and go quietly if he didn't use the roads.

All these precautions meant he met even less people than he might, but he didn't really want to meet them. He became attached to people easily, and was devastated when they went off. In some ways he was more afraid of meeting friendly people than nut cases.

This particular night, his fourth by the motorway, he was about to make an exception. He'd seen movement in another house not far away. They were being as careful as he was, but by chance he'd been nearby when someone had gone into the house, a woman. She'd been out for supplies judging by the bags she carried in. He'd watched the house for some hours and seen no more movement, so felt there could not be many there, she might even be by herself.

Sean was human, and not only missed Tanya emotionally but physically. He craved female company even more than he feared the consequences. If she were alone she might also want company. If there were a few at least he'd get some conversation. It was now two weeks since he'd spoken to anyone, he needed to hear a human voice almost as much as he needed the touch of a woman.

He got a shower and put on clean clothes. He hid one of his pistols in his back holster, collected up his basket with the food and wine he'd chosen and made his way on foot to the house just before dark. When he knocked at the door a young woman opened it almost at once. "Come in, I was hoping

you'd come. I thought about going round to your place but wasn't sure you'd want me to."

"You knew I was here?" asked Sean, shocked that his precautions weren't as effective as he'd thought. He was also surprised at the warm reception, almost familiar, as though she knew him.

She seemed just as shocked by his question, and stepped back a little, the warm smile completely gone. Her face showed puzzlement, and perhaps a little fear. Sean's first instinct was that she'd mistaken him for someone else, or perhaps she did know him and he'd forgotten her. Whatever the situation he didn't know how to handle it. This wasn't just the simple meeting of strangers he'd expected and planned for.

The fear in her face put Sean on the defensive. He had to reassure her, calm her. He didn't want her slamming the door in his face before he could get some explanation of what was going on here.

As she didn't speak Sean quickly continued. "I didn't know you were here till earlier today. I didn't think you'd know about me, I've only been here a few days, and haven't been out much."

This wasn't working out at all as he'd hoped. The woman still said nothing, just stood staring at him with a deep frown, as though he were speaking a foreign language. He hadn't a clue what she'd expected, but every word he said seemed to confuse her more. Every word she didn't say confounded him.

Finally he decided straight questions were the way to go. "Do you know me? Have we met? Should I know you?"

She stood quite some time before she answered, and when she did the warmth had gone from her voice. "I saw you yesterday, thought you'd seen me, that's all."

Things were not getting any clearer to Sean. What she said didn't explain the warmth and familiarity she'd shown when he first arrived. The invitation wasn't obvious any more either. She seemed cold and suspicious, which is exactly what he'd expected. He decided to put her first words aside for now. He was in the situation for which he'd prepared, so he'd carry on as though their first words hadn't been spoken.

"I brought some food and drink as an offering. I've been alone some time and would very much like a little company. I haven't seen anyone for almost two weeks. If you want to be left alone I'll understand. You can keep the food anyway."

His reserved approach seemed to work, soften her a little, perhaps reassure her that he wasn't a threat. That's what he'd intended.

After a few minutes thought she she stood back a little from the door. "Come in."

He gingerly walked past her into a very cosy room, clean and well furnished. It even had a large TV and stereo system, not currently working. The woman closed the door and went over to the window and closed the heavy curtains. Then she switched on the lights, low voltage fluorescents. She had a bank of batteries wired into the mains obviously.

"My name's Sean," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'm Tanya," she responded guardedly.

A pain shot through Sean, instant depression as a picture of his wife standing lifeless beside their bed flashed into his mind. He couldn't hide the distress, almost broke out in tears. His hand dropped and so did his jaw, he couldn't speak. Tanya backed away, very afraid of his reaction.

"That was my wife's name," he stated, to explain his sudden recoil from her. "It's still a painful memory."

Tanya smiled warmly, her release of tension so abrupt she almost seemed in danger of collapsing. "That explains everything. You've broken out but couldn't make contact because of my name. I've been aware of you ever since you arrived." She flopped down in a chair obviously very relieved. "You really had me scared for a few minutes, I thought maybe I'd been sensing someone else."

Sean lifted his eyes to hers and saw a familiar face. Confusion couldn't adequately describe him, his whole world was spinning. He knew this woman, knew her intimately, her thoughts and moods, yet he knew it was the first time they'd met.

"I haven't a clue what you're talking about, or what's going on. I know you but I didn't a minute ago. I've never talked to you before, or seen you before this afternoon, and I haven't broken out of anything." Sean's mind seemed to have moved to a dream like world. He couldn't think at all. He knew this woman yet he couldn't, and she knew him, but they'd never met. He instantly glanced at his watches, was this it, the end. His watches said ten minutes past something. Nearly all went off on the hour, nearly all. Was he going to be an exception.

"You should open that bottle of wine you brought and sit down, before you fall. I'm sorry about your wife."

Sean sat down without thinking, expecting any second complete blackness. His wife, the children, the time and this new Tanya all fighting for attention from his consciousness, and any one of them capable of taking it away.

Tanya gently took the wine from him and opened it. She poured a glass and handed it to him, then poured one for herself. Sean drank it like water, never even tasted it.

"Are you all right?" she asked, standing over him.

"I just need a minute to get my mind in order. Nothing seems to make sense any more. It's like I've stepped into another world."

"Do you know anything about telepathy?"

The question seemed irrelevant somehow, and he answered with little interest, still searching his mind for the first signs of disaster.

"No."

"Everyone is telepathic, but it's at the subconscious level in most. It only comes to the conscious mind when you're under deep relaxation. You transmit all the time, whatever you think you transmit. During REM sleep your mind filters the transmissions so they become semi-conscious thoughts. We've

always called them dreams. That's why they seem disjointed, they're many experiences mixed up."

This all seemed totally stupid to Sean. He was near some kind of breakdown and she was talking about dreams. He felt almost as he had with the man on the station. He needed peace and quiet to come to terms with things, not explanations of things that were of no interest to him whatever. However he didn't have the strength of will to intervene.

"Lucid dreamers can focus in on individual experiences, which means they're focused to certain people. Sometimes this ability crosses to the conscious mind. These people are truly telepathic."

At this point she paused, and Sean felt obliged to say something

"I might well be going insane, and you're talking about something that's never been proven."

"Bear with me, it will make sense to you, and as far as proof goes I'm coming to that. We think governments, encouraged by their security services, made sure telepathy was never proved. They had some way of blocking it. Now things have broken down we're gaining use of it, which everyone should have had from birth."

"Why would they want to block telepathy?" asked Sean, not finding this explanation helpful. He didn't believe in telepathy, but something strange was definitely going on here. He knew her, he still couldn't come to terms with that.

"Because everybody transmits then it would only need one telepath to home in on a government minister to know what he was doing, thinking. Can you imagine life without secrets. None of our current governments would survive, or those behind them."

"You're saying you can read my mind?" He found the thought distinctly shocking, and the implication that he could read hers ridiculous.

"No, of course not, but I can read your thoughts to some extent, as you can read mine. It's not a word for word thing, but that is possible. You'd have to be in a very relaxed state with a very clear mind."

"Are you a member of one of these cults or something?" he asked, none too pleasantly. He'd never heard anything good about any of them on the news. The word 'cult' itself was in a way an insult.

"No, I'm just the same as you, but the shock of this catastrophe has broken me and lots of others out. We're aware of each others thoughts. I instinctively know what would please or upset you, I know how you'd react in a given situation. I know your character as well as if we'd been close friends for years. You know me the same way."

Sean was now totally confused mentally, but his emotional distress had faded. He really felt like he knew her, but to him that was just a feeling. She was saying he did know her. For reasons he couldn't understand what she said made sense, fit reality. Perhaps he wanted to believe it, or perhaps his mind just needed an excuse to get away from the past. Whatever the case all his distress had gone. His mind was totally absorbed in this conversation.

Other forces were also at work. He felt she liked him, was very

attracted to him, as he was to her. A great deal of that attraction was physical on his part. She was pretty and he was deprived. If what she said was true this was also real. He needed to find out for certain, and tried to switch his mind from the sexual thoughts until he got confirmation they weren't one sided. He looked at her as he prepared to ask his next question, then saw the blush on her face. Her embarrassed expression stopped him cold, put him at a complete loss.

"This is an impossible situation!" was all he could think to say as he turned his rapidly heating face away from her. Then he turned back, ignoring his own embarrassment at his red face. He knew she wasn't rejecting him, or upset by what he was thinking, which she could easily have guessed.

"Did you know what I was thinking then, or guess?"

"I might have guessed, but it was obviously right. That's how it works. I'll always guess right, as you will about me. The problem is accepting it. In the past you could never be sure, but even then contact like this often happened. Now you can be sure."

Sean grabbed for the wine bottle and quickly refilled his glass. He took a long drink, screwing his face up at the keen taste. "Is it like this with everyone?"

"Everyone who's broken out, yes. What we've found is that anyone who hasn't broken out does as soon as they have direct contact with one who has."

Sean took another long swig at the wine, then refilled his glass. Tanya had hardly touched hers.

"You say this has been hidden or suppressed, how? And how could anyone keep this a secret for so long?"

"It's never been a secret, merely discredited, the way most things are hidden. You mentioned cults a while ago. A cult is merely a group of people with different religious ideas than the majority. There is no proof for any religion, so why are different ones discredited by being labelled cults. No religion can claim a majority, so in a way all are cults, but in this country the ruling classes espoused Christianity for their own purposes, so that is the mainstream."

"Why? Why discredit it, or hide it anyway? There must be better reasons than political privacy, especially if they have ways of blocking it."

"I don't know, but we do know the lives of thousands or even millions have been destroyed to keep it hidden. It's all to do with the mind control programs, here and in America. There they were supposed to have been stopped, but not here."

"I can't take this all in at once. This bottle of wine isn't going to be nearly enough. I'll go get some more."

Sean felt that somehow an opportunity had been lost. Talk of secret government projects ruining peoples lives had somehow pushed any intimacy to the back. He left hurriedly and went to the pub to get more wine. If they had enough to drink he felt the conversation would inevitably move towards sex. That was to him much more important than what had happened in the past.

As he collected the bottles he couldn't get his mind off what she'd said. Could it be true, could such things have been going on all around him. He strongly suspected it was true. He'd heard something about mind control programs on the news once or twice, but hadn't really taken any notice, it didn't affect him. Perhaps that's how it had been hidden, people not taking much notice because it didn't affect them, or at least they didn't think it did.

It was all irrelevant now, or was it? What were those soldiers doing? He really didn't want to think about things like this tonight. There were much more urgent and to him important matters. He was in the company of a very pretty girl, who apparently liked him and for just a moment seemed to want what he did. For tonight they needed to recapture that moment they had when they both blushed. The rest they could talk about later.

He pushed through the door carrying enough wine to get them both drunk. Tanya sat on a cushion near the fire. She laughed when she saw the armful of bottles he was carrying.

"I'm sorry I broke the atmosphere, but I do feel strongly about what they did, and I was a bit nervous, things were moving very fast."

Sean sat beside her and put the bottles on the floor. "You're right, they were moving fast. It even took me by surprise, enough to make me blush. I'd be a liar if I said that wasn't a large part of the reason I came over, but things like that should be approached properly. We should have a few drinks, get to know each other and see where it goes from there."

"I'm nervous, but I don't want to talk, or get drunk. We both know what we want, and I don't like wasting time nowadays. I did too much of that before and have now missed for ever many opportunities.

I never had sex with my boyfriend, we decided to wait till we were married. We figured it would be much better that way, although neither of us were virgins. When this first started one of his relations got it, and he had to go to see them. He never came back. That was about the time it began to dawn on everyone that this was more than a simple epidemic. The news reported that an estimated five million people died in one day, the day my boyfriend died. They stopped reporting the numbers after that, but it didn't matter, you could see it all around you.

I swore an oath that day never to hesitate or delay anything again. I might go in the next hour, or you might."

Sean didn't quite know what to do. He was scared. He'd only ever known one woman sexually, and that was his wife. They'd met when children, always gone out with each other and married when they were eighteen and she'd become pregnant. Tanya sounded a little more experienced. Sean was afraid his limited experience would disappoint her.

As he hesitated, thinking, staring at the wine she smiled and got hold of his hand. "I'm not a loose woman, I just like you."

Sean also smiled, and relaxed. She'd guessed wrong. That wasn't what he'd been thinking. She couldn't read his mind.

They rose and went to the stairs, Sean's confidence fully restored after the shaking it had taken over the mind reading. Tanya spoke as they reached

the first step. "And I intend to enjoy myself because of or despite you. You can't disappoint me."

Sean almost lost his urges, but not quite. He was now too far gone with expectation for mere words to stop him.

He woke refreshed, almost reborn. He felt comfortable, safe. He hadn't forgotten his wife, and still grieved, but grieving with Tanya for company was far better than grieving alone, although her name caused him considerable discomfort.

He still had to find his children, or find out what happened to them, but the world seemed a lot brighter now than a few hours ago.

When Tanya woke Sean already had breakfast cooked. She came and joined him without dressing, looking a little surprised, perhaps even annoyed. The problem was obvious to Sean, and he was once again thrown on the defensive.

"It's just habit. I'm used to getting up early, usually in a panic to get myself and the kids ready for work and school. T..my wife used to sleep in. I'd wake her as we all left."

"It's not a good habit with people you've only just met. I felt deserted when I woke alone."

"I'm sorry, but I felt so good when I woke I had to get up and do something, and I didn't like to wake you. That's the first time I've felt good for a very long time."

Tanya accepted his explanation fully, and became very relaxed, smiling warmly as she sat down to eat.

"Do you always walk about naked? I'm certainly not complaining but I probably am staring."

"It takes me a while to wake. I can't think clearly enough to decide what clothes to wear till I come round properly, and so long as that's all you do your staring doesn't bother me."

Sean had already realised Tanya wasn't a morning person. He was a little surprised at just how grumpy she seemed to be. He suspected a little acting because her words didn't quite fit his impressions of her. He was confident enough in his judgement to risk suggesting they move.

"I was thinking about travelling clothes," said Sean carefully. He needed to get on but also needed Tanya to go with him. If it came to it and she refused he wasn't sure what he'd do.

"You want to get after your children?"

"Yes. It's not really a rush, just that I feel better if I'm moving. It's so long now that there's probably nothing I can do for them. If they're still alive they must have found someone to look after them, probably a lot better than I could. But I still need to know."

Tanya ate her food in silence for some time, and Sean could do nothing but wait for her response. Telepathy or not he couldn't tell what her reaction was going to be. She'd finished before she spoke, and then only really to herself, thinking aloud.

"Jeans I think. Maybe an anorak." Then she turned to Sean. "Think it's going to rain?"

Sean breathed a great sigh of relief. "Doesn't look like it. Nice sunny morning. A bit fresh though, so I'd wear something under the anorak."

Tanya just smiled. She wasn't at all uncomfortable being naked with him. Sean was a little uncomfortable though. Her state aroused him, he found it difficult to think of much else. To get his mind off sex he asked her about something that had puzzled him since they first met.

"You kept saying we last night, is there someone else here?"

"Not now. A group of people gathered here for a while and we all became friends. We decided we had to spread what we knew. Most have gone on to the coast, but some have spread out to net as many survivors as they can. I stayed here, it's a kind of cross road. I catch those going North or South. But you're the first in over a week. I think it's time I moved on."

"I'm making my way to the coast," said Sean.

"Yes I know. I didn't read your mind, you told me the first time we talked I think, or I guessed."

"I don't remember telling you anything much," replied Sean. The thought that someone else could read his mind disturbed him greatly. He still didn't believe it but even the possibility was unsettling.

"You must have told me enough to put the rest together, because I know you're looking for your children, and think they may be at the coast. That makes sense anyway because everyone else is heading there."

"I don't think I did tell you. It's this contact thing again." He was finding her guesses far too near the mark. He was frantically searching for explanations other than telepathy.

"What does it matter whether you used words or directly imparted the information."

"It matters because I don't understand telepathy. I've no idea what I'm saying to people, and no control over it."

"You probably will have when you get used to it. I don't take any notice any more"

Sean didn't think he'd ever get used to it. His mind had its own way when he encountered people, often giving graphic descriptions to them or about them. None of which were suitable for broadcast. He'd have to be very careful what he thought next time he saw someone he didn't like the looks of or badly dressed or anything. He could find himself very unpopular. His thoughts when he encountered pretty or sexy women made him shudder.

It took most of the morning to pack the two horses with all the things they felt they'd need, only finally starting about mid day. As it started out promising to be a pleasant day they walked, leading the horses. They talked and laughed as they moved through the green countryside in the cool sun of late September. So far there was little sign of the brown of autumn, leaves and grasses still lush with life. Only shortening days told of the waning year.

Recounting their past experiences past the time more pleasantly than

either would have imagined, the experiences being so bad. Talking about them under these conditions took away much of the pain and sadness. Sean even managed to talk about his wife without breaking down. The mind has an even greater capacity for healing than the body, and this Tanya was the best medicine he could have found. She listened well and truly understood, both words and the feelings behind them, and also many things not said.

Sean made light of his adventures after his wife died, but could not hide his fears about the soldiers. Tanya was inclined to take things at face value, not assigning any sinister motives to their actions. Sean didn't try to convince her because deep down he wanted to believe in people as much as she did, he was also reluctant to say anything that might dampen her spirits because they were lifting him, but his instincts told him differently.

From Tanya's house it was only about ten kilometres to York, but then a longer trek up to Whitby, which is where people had gathered. Sean tended not to cover much ground because he released any farm animals he came across, pulled down fences and threw out any food for the dogs. This also meant he often had dogs following him, sometimes quite a number. He didn't encourage any to become familiar because he didn't want responsibility for them.

He had however become fond of one. He called it wolf, because it looked a bit like one. It never came very near, but always seemed to be in the vicinity when he was out in the open. He opened cans of food for it, leaving the food on plates. The dog only came to the food when Sean was well away. It was one of the few dogs he didn't feel sorry for. He was quite sure that wolf could look after itself, but it seemed to have attached itself to Sean.

Tanya was quite impressed by his thoughtfulness. It had never occurred to her that eventually the sheep and cattle would starve if left fenced in. The dogs had worried her, and she'd thought about how to fight them off should they attack, not about feeding them. She was also impressed by the lack of progress they were making.

"Do you always travel like this?"

Her question wasn't in anyway critical, but after several hours she could almost still see the house they'd left. It occurred to her that it might have been better to stay there longer and come and free the animals.

"Yes. While I was waiting at home for the children to turn up I started making trips into the country, just in case they were at a farm or something. That's when I realised how much trouble a lot of animals were in, so I started doing this. I went out each day releasing animals. As each time I had to go further, when I reached my there and back in a day limit without finding any more animals I set off on this trip. I've been travelling like this ever since. Some days I don't even make two kilometres. I don't think there are a lot of animals out this way, so we should make better progress."

"We could have stayed at the house and come out here to do this, going back each night."

"As I said I feel better when I'm moving. Any place I stay at for long I start to think of as home, and that depresses me. I don't want a home yet, it's

too painful."

"That explains not staying but we're not really moving either. What about rushing to find your children?"

"They're either safe or long dead. I'm anxious to find them but not in a rush. The animals are important. We need them to survive for our future if we do. And if we don't they inherit the planet and should be given every chance. I'd hate to think we were leaving it to cockroaches. I somehow like the thought of some dog archaeologist studying my bones to figure out what I was."

"And whether you were edible?"

Sean smiled, the first since his wife died. "Maybe. I'm quite sure our distant ancestors made the same decisions about things they found buried."

"We'll still be here," said Tanya a little more seriously. "I don't feel threatened any more. The time doesn't seem important. It does seem important not to waste it though."

"I still find myself looking at the time much more than I should." Sean replied, more seriously. He still suffered from his hourly cycles, but he could control them. They didn't affect his actions any more. "In fact I've no reason at all for having a watch now, but I feel I need one. I'm not convinced this is over yet."

"I didn't say it was over, just that I feel safe. I don't feel you're in danger either."

"That's just the pleasantness of the day I think, but I hope you're right. I think I'll keep feeding the dogs and releasing animals anyway."

"As you pointed out that will be to our future benefit. Hopefully the dogs will eventually take to eating sheep and such and not people."

"I can think of one group of people I'd be quite happy to see eaten," said Sean, completely changing the mood. He had real fear of them, and hatred. That man had tried to kill him, and he strongly suspected the body they threw over the bridge wasn't a victim of the virus. "These soldier types are up to something. They almost killed me and were responsible for the deaths of at least thirty, some of their own. We don't need people lording it with guns. We're going to have enough trouble just surviving. If they are going round killing people then they need destroying."

"Only one of them attacked you, and he was drunk or insane you said."

"The people he killed were ones they had rounded up and were herding somewhere. If they hadn't been rounded up he couldn't have killed them. While this virus is about the last thing we need is people gathered together and armed men among them. As far as I'm concerned those people were murdered, not by the mad soldier but by who ever ordered the rounding up. If there are armed men at Whitby it's just a disaster waiting to happen. That kind of stupidity, or malice, we can't afford."

"Malice? You think they're putting people in danger purposely?"

"It seems that way," he replied. That thought had never occurred to him before, but it did now. People who went off were incredibly dangerous if

they could harm others. The safest thing would be to spread people about, isolate them till this was over, or at the very least disarm everyone. Yet the soldiers had grouped people together, and were very well armed, with rockets in at least one case. That was insane. "If I met the politicians or whoever else is ordering things like this I'd line them up against a wall and shoot them.

"Revenge doesn't solve any problem. We need all the people there are left. The ones you encountered were probably just a rogue group."

"You don't know that. They seemed organised, as though there is someone trying to impose their authority through force. We don't need a ruling elite running our lives any more, and certainly not if they were ruining them for their own purposes, as you claim. Arms kill people, they have no other use, apart from control. That's how people have always been controlled, through force or deception. Now the world is falling apart, we're dying as a species, but still some want control. You claim deception isn't practicable any more, but force is. No one is immune to bullets. Just now we need to have no controls. People need to be left alone and perhaps some will survive, but the opposite seems to be happening. The organisation we've had in the past will finish us, and that's what they seem to be trying to re-create."

"The past is gone, they can't reclaim it. I'm not worried about them anyway."

Tanya's general demeanor was very pleasant, and somehow carefree. Totally out of place really. It totally deflated Sean. He'd become heated thinking about the soldiers, but his deep sinister thoughts flew over her head. She probably thought him insane, and she might be right. He had no evidence, just a chance meeting with men in uniform which had turned very sour. He was probably drawing all the wrong conclusions from one bad experience. He had to look at things from a less pessimistic view, a view he'd acquired from his grief. Things couldn't be as black as he was painting them. The sun was shining, he had a pretty and very intelligent girl for company and it was good to be alive. The virus wasn't the only thing to travel between minds.

"Why is everyone going to the coast?" asked Sean, a little puzzled by that. Why not to London, or Swindon for that matter. Why Whitby.

"I don't know. I suppose someone thought it was a nice place and it just caught on. I don't suppose it matters really, so long as everyone goes to the same place."

"Yes it does!" snapped Sean, suddenly thrown back into his black mood. "The weather is better down south, and we'd be nearer the continent. There must have been more survivors down there because there are more people. Why have them come all this way?"

"I don't know. What are you getting at?"

"I don't know either, but in light of what you've said and what I know I'm more than a little suspicious. Those soldiers were heading north, which would be the way to Whitby, if that's where they were going."

"You think someone's herding us all there for some reason?"

"Just something worth thinking about before we go marching in. I may be wrong about them, you make more sense in a way but herding people

together anywhere is stupid."

Sean was reluctant to press his arguments further. He really believed sinister things were going on but didn't want to depress Tanya just in case he was wrong. After all things couldn't possibly be as bad as he was imagining.

"At the rate we're travelling we'll have plenty of time to think about it, about a month I'd guess," snided Tanya.

"I don't think it'll take that long, but I feel like I've done enough today. It's getting late and there's a building just ahead, old pub or something."

"Smoke from the chimney." Tanya pointed out to him. "Must be occupied."

This was the main road to York, and many people must have come this way. The perfect place to intercept them. Sean felt very insecure about meeting strangers out here. Besides he didn't need anyone else just now, and felt very protective of Tanya. He didn't intend to let her down or lose her as he had everyone else.

"Come on Tanya, off the road," he said, virtually dragging her to the hedge.

"What's wrong?" she asked urgently, completely taken by surprise by his actions.

"If you wanted to intercept people this would be the place to do it."

"If they were taking people to Whitby why intercept those on the way. All they have to do is wait and they'll get there themselves."

"I don't know what's going on, but it won't do any harm to check things out. You stay here with the horses and I'll go in quietly round back from this field. If there are any soldiers there we'll find another way through."

"Too late," she said, not at all alarmed. She didn't see any serious danger, and probably even looked forward to meeting people. "One's coming this way."

A man in his fifties walked briskly towards them. His casual dress and lack of weapons eased Sean's fears slightly. He headed straight for them and had obviously seen them from the building and was coming to meet them. He had dark thinning hair, was slim and his step had a spring to it, obviously fit. He was clean shaven with a thin face, furrows between his eyes, his brows thin and short.

"Good evening. I'm Alan," he said, approaching them with outstretched hand.

Sean moved out to meet him, and shook hands, Tanya came up beside and did likewise, both giving their names.

"We saw you from the house some time ago, and when we saw you hesitating we felt it best to come out. Please come on to the house, it's safe. You're in no danger from us."

His voice and manner reassured them, made them feel comfortable. Neither questioned their feelings, simply accepted the invitation. Alan walked between the two as they led their horses towards the building.

"Visitors are getting a bit thin on the ground these days, they also seem to be getting a little wary, as you are. We keep a close watch on the road

to make sure they don't get past without talking to us. Exactly why we'll explain as soon as we're inside. You can put your horses in that fenced area." He indicated a large garden area at the front of the house. The gate into the area was also the access to the front door and further round French windows.

After turning the horses loose in what had been a front garden he led inside the house. It was a huge house, converted from a pub or something. Old oak beams stretched across the high ceiling in this main room. Massive windows and glass doors led out to the garden, and let vast amounts of light in. Their horses, still with saddles and all their gear were cropping the overgrown lawn just beyond the windows.

Only one person occupied the room as they entered. A woman, also in her fifties, but well preserved. She stood to greet them and was quite tall, close to six feet, about the same as Alan. She greeted them warmly, her name was Catherine, but she preferred Cath.

"Take your coats off and sit down, make yourselves comfortable. I'll get you a hot drink and when you've rested a bit you can take care of your animals. You're the first people we've seen for a few days."

"Apart from Tanya here you're the first I've seen for a few weeks," replied Sean.

"Yes," replied Cath sadly. "We are a bit thin on the ground now. Heading for the coast?"

"Seems to be the place to go these days," replied Sean lightly. "It's where everyone seems to have gone anyway."

"It's not the place to go, but that's a story that can wait a while. First tell us your tale, where you've been, what you've been doing since this started."

Sean told his story in great detail. He expected surprise or shock when he recounted his experiences with the soldiers, but no one batted an eyelid. Tanya had a much shorter tale. As the people around her in the village, including her parents, died she moved in with a group of students. One of them broke out, and brought the rest along. Then they scattered to help others. Tanya remained to intercept people travelling up or down the A1.

Before anyone else could speak a young man came in the room. He was introduced as Robin. He addressed Tanya and Sean.

"There's a pack of dogs out there, looks like they're following you. Might be after your horses, or something you're carrying."

"That'll be wolf," said Sean. "He seems to turn up everywhere I go. He won't come near. He sometimes has other dogs with him, but they've never bothered me or the horses. I suppose we'd better unload the horses anyway, give them a chance to rest and feed."

"They shouldn't need a lot of rest," replied Tanya. "They haven't done anything yet." She turned to Catherine. "He dumps food for the dogs everywhere he goes, that's why they follow him. And it's not hard. We've covered about ten kilometres today, if that."

"Probably a very good idea making friends with them," replied Alan, opening the French windows for them. "They outnumber us thousands to one."

Just the same keep an eye on them Robin."

Robin left the room the way he'd come, Alan and Cath followed Sean and Tanya into the large front yard and helped them unload the horses. When they returned to the house there were four more people there, three men and a woman, Craig, Dick, Liam and Lean. All their gear they dumped just inside the window and then joined the rest for introductions.

A party of sorts ensued as the sun sank. Candles lighted the house and heavy curtains were drawn. Robin re-joined the company for dinner, which although made entirely from the contents of cans and packets was quite pleasant. Drinks were passed around and Sean eventually fell asleep on the couch.

He woke after a few hours, the room was still lit with candles. Tanya was sat at the fire with Alan and Cath, talking quietly. The rest of the crowd had disappeared. Sean went over and joined them.

"I'm glad you're awake Sean," began Tanya. "From what Alan says it seems like they are rounding people up. Whitby is a prison of some kind." She sounded shocked, or perhaps even disgusted, but that revelation didn't surprise Sean at all.

"Why are they rounding up and holding people, and who are 'they'?" he asked. So far he could see no logic behind any of this, unless someone actually wanted to kill everyone.

"We don't know exactly who they are," continued Alan. "It seems whoever they are they were in control of the world before this began. They're rounding people up so they can control them. It's all about power we think."

"Don't they think we have enough problems with the virus. It's killed billions and they're making it worse rounding people up with armed men, any of which could massacre thousands when they go off."

"You're right about that." The man called Craig stood just behind Sean. He was probably in his thirties, well built and eager looking. Sean hadn't heard him approach, and jumped when he spoke. Sean was also speaking directly to Alan and felt this interruption impolite, however he said nothing, not being at all sure of Craig's position in the group.

"But there's a lot more to it than that. They've been controlling whole populations for decades, using psychology, propaganda and even force where necessary, and still can to some extent. They were taking over the whole world, making everyone puppets, using money, wars or whatever it took. With so few left they could mould us all into virtual zombies, re-make the world according to their own visions."

This passionate outburst told Sean a great deal about Craig. He was obviously one of these anti-globalisation people. Sean had never given much thought to them, the issue didn't really affect him. He'd always been too busy worrying about paying his own bills to worry about international finances. He felt a little more comfortable though, now he had Craig pigeon holed. Alan and Cath simply stared at the fire, making no response. Sean himself didn't want to get tangled in arguments he knew nothing about, so he also didn't respond. Tanya broke the tense silence, and addressed herself to Craig.

"They can't control people any more, and whatever they're doing at Whitby can't last. The soldiers are going to break out or die sooner or later. Either way they won't have an army long."

"There may be some ordinary soldiers with them, but the ones in control are either telepath's or immune, and they are the soldiers. The uniforms are just convenient symbols of authority. The army disbanded itself, after it had virtually disintegrated. Only a very small percentage of the population was in the army, yet these 'soldiers' make up half the people left. These are the ones who want control, the men in black, the 'secret services'. If they aren't destroyed they'll destroy us."

Now Craig really was getting carried away, except for one thing. He was probably right about them being a danger. They were collecting people in one place for whatever reason, and that was dangerous.

"Don't you think there's been enough death with the virus." retorted Tanya, also showing signs of getting heated. "Do you want to finish off what it started. If the few of us left start killing each other it's all over. This is about the survival of mankind."

"That's exactly it. The virus is just a part of the cancer killing us. That cancer has to be destroyed. They still have their so called 'psychotronic weapons' and are still using them. The virus was just a part of that arsenal. If what some believe is true there are far deadlier possibilities just waiting in the wings. Every vestige of these weapons has to be eradicated, along with those using them."

Now he really was losing Sean. He'd never heard of psychotronic weapons, and the suggestion that the virus was a weapon of some kind he found unbelievable. No one would build such a weapon, no one could be that insane.

"You're getting a little overheated Craig," interrupted Alan. "We have no evidence at all that anyone made the virus. This discussion should be conducted with cool heads. Tomorrow might be a better time."

Craig ignored him, continued speaking directly to Tanya. "These people could read minds, control the way people think, in individuals extensively and the population in general quite strongly. Apathy was always one of their best weapons, and probably the most used." he turned to Alan. "They are still transmitting Alan, don't let your defences down."

That sounded very close to an insult to Sean. He could see this developing into a fight between the two men. Unfortunately he was right in the middle, and began to feel very uncomfortable. Alan replied directly to Craig. "You are not the only one who sees the problem, nor is your solution the only one. Their mood controlling weapons can also create anger, another effective weapon. Don't let your defences down."

Craig smiled, and seemed to deflate. "That was badly out of line. I apologise unreservedly."

Sean hadn't fully understood the arguments, but instantly recognised the peaceful conclusion. He breathed a sigh of relief that the danger of being trampled as the two jumped on each other had gone.

Cath was watching Tanya, who's facial expression showed that these arguments had made her think. She turned to Craig, who was also looking at Tanya, and spoke for the first time, looking at Craig but her words aimed at Alan. "I don't think Craig is in any danger of his own anger being used against him. He's very well versed in the uses of anger."

Craig glanced at her and smiled again, then turned and walked out of the room. Alan burst out laughing. "He used me like a tool, and I let him. Tanya that whole outburst was aimed at you, including the part he made me play."

Sean was now totally lost. He seemed to be excluded from the conversation. He also felt a little threatened. Was Craig making some kind of complicated play for Tanya, is that what Alan was implying. If so Craig had just gained a bad enemy.

"He does make sense," said Tanya thoughtfully. "If what he and you said about their weapons is true."

"Unfortunately that is what we believe the situation to be," replied Alan, "and his solution may be the only one. I resist him not from apathy but from simple fear, and he knows that."

"Why was it aimed at me?" she asked, causing Sean's ears to prick up.

"Simply because you had a different opinion. He believes himself absolutely right because he can see no alternative. Convincing you confirms that to him, and I must admit to me as well."

Sean wasn't sure what to make of that, whether or not to be comforted. Tanya was very intelligent, and a lot more sophisticated than Sean, so it seemed was Craig. He'd keep a very close watch on Craig, and Tanya. Losing her would devastate him, to Craig not much less than to the virus.

"What are you going to do, make war on these people." she asked, appalled at the thought.

"That I fear is going to happen. And I mean it when I say fear. They have all the weapons, both conventional and unconventional. We have a few rifles."

"I need to sleep on all this. I thought I knew what was going on but it turns out I knew nothing. I can't accept killing people. I don't hate anyone, perhaps I should but I don't. Craig makes a persuasive argument for killing without hate. I don't know if I can accept that."

"What about you Sean?" asked Alan. "You haven't said much."

"I've no problem at all with the idea of killing them, I do hate them. My only problem would be actually doing it, they fight back." Sean would never forget his first and nearly last encounter with one of them. He still couldn't understand how he'd won.

"With every visitor we get I hope for an alternative, but so far have heard none. And now I think time has run out. I doubt any more will pass this way. I don't see any way we can win, but I suppose some ways of loosing are worse than others." He rose stiffly from his chair and Cath rose with him. As they left the room Cath turned to Sean and Tanya.

"There are no spare beds I'm afraid, just make yourselves comfortable

in here, or if you want privacy there's a study through that door. There's no fire in there though. Good-night."

Sean and Tanya decided to use the main room. It wasn't cold but the open fire was still inviting. A thick carpet provided good padding and their sleeping bags warmth. Intimacy wasn't practical under the circumstances so they both probably got more sleep than usual, feeling very secure with so many others near.

The young man called Liam woke them next morning. He burst excitedly into the main room carrying the rocket launch tube and four rockets Sean had thrown into the bushes. He didn't seem to notice either of them, and shouted for Craig. Craig came into the room, dressed exactly as he had been the night before.

"That was quick Liam. Get anything else?"

"Four rifles, four pistols and a load of bullets. There's probably more buried under the rubble. I'd need help to move it though."

Sean stood up attracting the attention of the men. Craig immediately apologised for waking him, but it wasn't real regret merely politeness. He took possession of the tube and turned to Sean.

"Do you know where there's any more stuff like this?"

Sean had to clear his head. He hadn't told Craig about the soldiers at the colliery, so someone else must have while he slept. This other man, Liam, must have gone straight away last night to get the weapons.

"No, that's all I know of." Then Sean remembered the suitcase.

"These psychotronic weapons, would they be in a briefcase."

"A briefcase might contain some I suppose. We've never seen any, some have to be very small, microscopic perhaps, others involve power stations and the grid. I expect they're every shape and size between as well. Do you have a briefcase with weapons in?"

"I don't know if it has weapons, but it's like a laptop computer but with strange controls in place of the keyboard, and it's also a video phone of some kind. I disturbed a man in York using it behind a pile of rubble. He took a swing at me and ran off, left it behind. I threw it in an abandoned train in a tunnel on a siding just outside the station."

"I've been on watch all night," said Craig. "Robin's had a good rest. I'll see if he'll go."

"It's all right Craig, I'll go. I'm not tired and it's not far." replied Liam.

"Take Robin with you. This might be important. Can you describe the case, and exactly where you left it."

"Yes, of course." Sean gave very detailed instructions on where the train was and what the case looked like. Liam went off and woke Robin and the pair of them left on trials bikes.

"They should be back in less than two hours, in the meantime let's go through what Liam brought," said Craig excitedly.

He put the rocket tube down then went out the door, returning straight away dragging a large sack in that Liam had left at the door. He laid out the contents, along with the RPG on the living room floor. By this time everyone

was up and examining the things.

Tanya stood back a little with Sean. She looked at the weapons with disgust in her face.

"Are you really seriously thinking about starting a war?" she asked Craig, making her disapproval very obvious with her tone.

"Of course not," he replied, not looking up from the rifle he was examining. "They started it fifty years ago or more. We're just going to finish it."

Tanya turned to Sean for possible support. The look on his face said everything. He was smiling.

In 1952 the CIA bought the services of children from relatives. One case that has come to light is that of Carol Rutz, who beginning at the age of four was subjected to various traumas and tortures. The aim was to make her compliant and then split the personality.

The US and Canadian governments have paid millions in out of court settlements where victims have managed to sue, but these are probably only a tiny minority of victims.

chap 6

It was now late September as Chantry surveyed the changing scenery in the woods just upstream. Some leaves were already turning, which seemed early. He dismissed that as irrelevant and forced his mind back to his immediate problem, the elite hiding among the other tribunes.

After studying them all, day and night, analysing every word they said, he still hadn't come any nearer to identifying him. All the patrol leaders were now his, some having developed very crude psychic abilities under his tuition. He had four children identified as rogues, and would shortly begin their training, but so far hadn't had the time. This elite really had to be found.

There had been no further actions against chantry as far as he could tell, but the month's respite didn't make him feel any easier. He was more worried now than ever. What was he up to, what plot was being made that took this long to hatch. Chantry had done everything he could to be ready for anything, and hadn't left the ship, not even for a minute.

Staying on the ship limited him. The patrol leaders could visit him to make reports but he hadn't worked out how to deal with the rogue children. Having children aboard ship all the time would definitely raise questions, and they really needed to be isolated somewhere. There were plenty of places in town or just outside but he'd have to leave the ship, and his weapons, to spend the time with them for their training. He'd have to wait a little longer, till they had the power station restarted and linked to town.

He had met all four children and found them all highly developed, but on a subconscious level. The chemicals and radiation had stopped them developing further but hadn't diminished their potential. If this was typical of rogues, as he suspected, then any thoughts of turning off the satellite were completely out of the question. It would have to be left on until he regained total control of all areas, and that would take years.

The satellite didn't really help him that much because all those left, except those in town, were very resistant. It did still affect some, his patrols occasionally came across the odd victim, but they were few and far between now. All he could hope was that at least some of the rogues would succumb.

Who exactly developed the satellites he didn't know. Technological development had never been his responsibility. There were special groups dedicated to that. When they developed something, all elite would vote on whether or not to use it and how to use it. The satellite was supposed to be able to target small groups or even individuals who were developing psychic powers. It was mainly intended for use in under developed nations where the elite didn't have their control structure in place. The signal could easily be blocked, or the satellite shut down so it should have been safe.

Something went badly wrong when the first satellite started operations. It didn't target anyone, just swept the whole surface with a continuous signal. The portable protection devices had been tested in every way possible, were absolutely reliable, foolproof and gave one hundred percent protection, but when used in earnest didn't work, they merely delayed the effects. The elite didn't take chances, but something totally unforeseen had happened, they didn't know what.

This ship gave protection. Its transmitter blocked the signal, or it blocked its effects. It used the same technology as the portable devices, just bigger, but it worked. Even so it wasn't perfect protection as it should have been. Any who'd been in the protection field for any length of time could never leave it for long. By wearing portables a person could stay away up to ten days or so, but then they inevitably became victims. Without portables they didn't last three days. The effects were different as well. From first indications to final meltdown could be less than a day.

There were other large scale devices in most major cities, but they quickly became useless when power systems failed. Such a complete worldwide meltdown hadn't been seen as even a remote possibility. When it became obvious what was happening it was decided not to shut it down. Too many knew about it, everything would have come out eventually. The elite would have been unmasked and probably lynched. At that time they thought they were protected by the portables. They instantly issued orders to shut it down when they realised they weren't.

Then of course was the ludicrous situation where the satellite control facility lost power before the satellite had been shut down. Portable generators had been sent but by the time they were in place there were no personnel left who knew how to shut it down. Most of the workforce were ordinary people, unaware of the satellites existence.

Chantry had to make a shut down program himself so the ship could shut down the satellite. It had taken him weeks though, because first he had to learn how to program a computer. By the time it was ready it was too late, all the elite were gone, along with ninety five percent of the population. With millions of survivors scattered all over the planet and no control infrastructure in place Chantry decided to let the satellite run.

Chantry turned to go back inside the control room, his mind for once fully relaxed by the fresh air, but then he felt it again. The disturbance was back, very weak, tenuous, almost none existent. Just enough to detect. He tried to lock onto it, identify it, but the fear it brought clouded his mind, and he lost it completely. It had to be the rogues outside. They'd been away the past month but were now near again. Was this part of the plot against him that had been brewing for a month. Were things about to happen. He rushed straight to his cabin and activated all his spying devices on the other tribunes. None seemed to be doing anything unusual. The elite was being very clever, but he wouldn't be able to stay hidden forever. Chantry had devised traps for him when he acted, whatever that action was.

Just in case things went wrong, and he had to leave he'd wired the satellite transmitter, pre programmed to send the shut-down signal, to a switch on the bridge, as well as his controls in his room. The switch was disguised as a self destruct switch, to ensure no one tried it. The plastic case over it had to be smashed before it could be activated.

This didn't seem at all out of place to the others. It was obvious from the day the ship arrived that it had been a spy ship of some kind. Chantry used his authority as an agent of the government to recruit his little band, and when he made them all equals, as tribunes, they accepted anything he told them. He told them the area the ships transmitter could protect, but he didn't tell them what the virus was, or why it was. What they guessed he didn't care. As long as he controlled the ship, and therefore their protection, they did as he wanted.

They were only too eager to arrange an unlimited supply of fuel, and, when asked to dope the food and water, accepted his explanation that it kept everyone calm, under control. The stresses caused by the disease could have sparked riots, anarchy. They needed to maintain order.

Chantry's mind wondered, kept going to useless reminiscences He needed to get control, calm himself, relax, but it was impossible under the circumstances. Was this accidental or part of the secret elites plan. The main weapon used against anyone to stop them developing or using psychic power was tension, preventing them relaxing. They'd engineered whole societies to prevent people relaxing, keep everyone tense, worried. Debt, fear of crime, insecurity at work, anything that would cloud peoples minds. Those that could clear them received direct action, isolation using the stomach bacteria to give them body odour or bad breath, depression with chemicals, ionizers or psychological warfare

Chantry was isolated, could well be a victim of psychological warfare, in which case the disturbance was nothing. Problem was he couldn't risk that, couldn't ignore it. Besides they knew his name, they'd taken an agent, and two of his patrol leaders. That had happened, he'd even seen one of them, through the suitcase camera. No, psychological warfare wasn't the problem, rogues outside and an unidentified elite inside were the problems.

Chantry had all the ships keys and codes, that's what the elite was after. Without those the ship was useless, couldn't even sail. Chantry felt safe

so long as he was on the ship. If he did leave it would give the other elite time to try to break the codes, replicate the keys. If this disturbance was a creation of the elite it was to draw Chantry out to investigate it, get him off the ship, even out of town, because the only way he would be able to tune in to it was from outside the protection field, or shut the field down. He couldn't shut the protection field down and then restart it because he'd no idea what kinds of contact may go on while it was down. If there were rogues near they could infect any number of people in town, convey all kinds of information, maybe even turn the army against him. Whether the disturbance was rogues or created it would have to be ignored. In his position he could only control those in town, anything outside was beyond his influence for the time being.

The development of 'psychotronic' weapons has reached the stage where they are apparently in everyday use. The French authorities reputedly used infrasound weapons on demonstrators. These weapons, among other effects, tend to cause uncontrolled bowel movement.

chap07

When Robin and Liam returned with the briefcase most of the group were already gathered in the main room. They all crowded round to examine it as the two placed it on the table. Sean opened the lid revealing the screen, but couldn't do any more. He hadn't switched the thing off, but it showed no life now. Either it turned itself off when not in use or the batteries were dead. There was no obvious on and off switch, none of the controls made sense to anyone. When some wanted to test out the controls to see what they did Alan took charge.

"These could be very dangerous weapons. We need to find someone who knows something about them. Playing with it like a toy could cause all kinds of damage, to us or the case."

"It doesn't look like a weapon," put in Craig. "It looks more like some kind of spying device. Those two bits on wires look like cameras."

"You might be right Craig, but you might be wrong. No matter what it is we have no immediate use for it. The enemy is a long way away. Rather than risk anything when there's no need I think we should just leave it alone till we find someone who knows about it."

Alan was obviously regarded as some kind of informal leader, and his opinion was taken very seriously. Craig made it clear with his expression that he didn't agree, but he didn't make an issue of it. He closed the lid and handed it to Alan.

"All right Alan, for the time being we'll leave it alone. We have some conventional weapons, maybe we can capture one of them, make them tell us what it is."

"We have eight rifles four pistols and four rockets. If you include

Sean and Tanya there are nine people. This is hardly an army Craig."

"It's a start. We know there are other groups like ours, it's time we all got together, started coordinating efforts. I think we should spread out, go to the people we know and find any stragglers, tell them what's happening. Pool our information, and start collecting information about these people at Whitby."

"I'm going to Whitby," interrupted Sean. "I think my children might be there and I intend to find out."

"You'll just end up another prisoner," replied Alan.

"That's a risk I'll take."

"Sean you have a rifle and two pistols, you can't attack the place, can we have them?" asked Craig.

"Yes, except for the small pistol and back holster. The other pistol and rifle would be a liability if I did get caught. I don't intend to get caught though. I'll find out what's going on there and come back and tell you. If my kids are there I'll bring them back with me. If they've harmed them at all I'll do them some serious damage."

"I'll come with you," put in Tanya.

"Are you sure, it'll be dangerous."

Tanya just snorted. Danger wasn't really a consideration any more. Anyone could die at any time, although things did seem to have improved. They'd been among seven others for two days and none had gone off. Sean couldn't hide his pleasure. He suspected very strongly that Craig wanted Tanya, and she hadn't seemed too opposed to that. He could understand that. Craig was a go getting type, also intelligent and not bad looking. Sean wasn't that bright, and tended to be reserved. He'd almost resigned himself to the two of them getting together. But she'd chosen to come with him, and Craig's lower jaw showed his surprise. It had almost hit the floor.

Sean grabbed his things and went to load his horse before Tanya could change her mind. She joined him almost immediately and loaded her things on the other horse. Alan and Cath were the only ones to come out into the garden. They stood near the French windows as the two mounted.

"Take care, the pair of you," said Alan. "I can't see any way forward at all. We can't attack the place and I'm not at all sure we should. It might be better to just ignore them, leave them as they are and make our own civilisation. Anything you can find out would be very helpful."

"I don't think leaving them alone is an option," replied Sean. "I encountered them at home. They might come here next. They aren't going to leave us alone. I don't know what they're doing but I do know it's wrong. Hopefully I'll find out."

He kicked the horse into motion, and Tanya followed suit, quickly passing through the gate and out of sight of the others. They moved to the road and set off along it, the horses hooves making an incredible din on the tarmac.

"I thought you might have stayed with Craig." Sean said as soon as they were out of earshot. He could still hardly believe she was here with him.

Tanya smiled. "He thought that as well. He is attractive, but far too

sure of himself. He orders the two younger ones about but the rest are a bit too mature to take much notice of him. He's too immature for me as well. I started this with you and I'll see it through. It would never occur to him to feed the dogs, or free all the animals."

"That was just common sense to me," answered Sean, a little embarrassed.

"I didn't think of it either, and I don't think many others will. Even if they did they wouldn't spend the time and effort you do. Another point in your favour is the fact that you've already tangled with these soldiers, and won. Craig's only talked about it. I feel a lot safer with you than I would with him."

"As a fully paid up member of the Sean appreciation society I'm not going to argue with you," said Sean, feeling very uncomfortable with this conversation, but highly pleased. "however I don't think we'll be seeing that many animals from here on. A lot of people have been this way and I'm sure some would have the sense to realise the animals were in trouble. They'd be able to see it."

"You might be surprised. When people are worrying about their own survival they don't give too much thought to the plight of animals." Tanya glanced ahead. "There's a garage just up here, bet they have some dog food."

Sean just smiled. Tanya was far too pleasant for these times. His own Tanya had been totally different. She was serious and fastidious. The house was always spotless, meals exactly on time. She rarely found time to relax, even gave the impression she was uncomfortable with relaxation. She always needed to be doing something useful. Not surprising really, she hadn't had much life apart from her family. She'd had Rob when she was eighteen and Sue just over two years later.

Moving along the road they made good time, despite leaving it several times to pull down fences. They raided houses and garages for dog food and Tanya even started opening tins and dumping the contents on plates, till Sean pointed out that wolf and any dogs with him could only eat so much, and the rest would rot in a day or two, but might come in handy for anyone who had a dog with them if left in the tins.

They reached Malton before evening, which was something of a record for Sean as far as distance went. Nothing moved on the streets: cluttered with abandoned cars as all towns were; and the clomping of their horses hooves echoed round the empty houses. There was an eeriness to the town centre, but no bodies. Enough people had passed through recently enough that all had been cleared.

A comfortable house on the outskirts provided shelter for the night, and an adjacent field food for the horses. Next day they left the horses to feed and rest and went into the surrounding farmland on foot. It took all day to release all the animals they could find, and they spent another night before moving on.

Next day started out promising to be even better as far as progress went. They didn't make a single detour for the first two hours. A farm house beside the road just ahead was to be their first stop, both to rest themselves and

put out food for the dogs. They quickened the pace as they approached hedges just before the farm, but then pulled up suddenly as four men in soldiers uniforms sprang out into the road blocking their path. They all had rifles in their hands, and Sean thought better of trying to run for it.

Before anyone spoke a fifth came striding from the farmhouse, an officer of some kind.

"Get down!" he ordered as he approached

Sean was completely numb with fear. This was his worst nightmare come true. He glanced helplessly around in near panic for a way of escape but there was none. The country was mostly open, farm fields with low hedges. They'd be shot easily if they attempted any kind of escape. He slowly complied, dismounting carefully.

Tanya also got down, but she almost jumped. She didn't seem to share Sean's fear, or she hid it well. She had a look of indignation on her face, perhaps even anger. That made Sean feel even worse. She didn't understand the danger, might get them both killed.

"Search them Smith!" ordered the officer, and one of the soldiers complied, merely checking for any weapons they might have concealed on them. Neither had anything.

"What are your names and where are you going?" he demanded, standing proudly in front of them hands on his hips.

Sean tried to reply but totally misjudged the amount of effort needed to operate very slack jaw muscles. Tanya lifted her head defiantly and replied for him. "I'm Tanya and he's Sean. We're on our way to Whitby, which is really none of your business. Who do you think you are blocking our way?"

"I know who I am, but I don't know who you are, and that's what matters just now. You're on the York road, must have been somewhere near there yesterday. Four of our men were attacked just this side of York, one injured. I want to know by whom."

"We don't know anything about it. We were in Malton yesterday, spent the day there." Tanya replied.

"Malton is deserted, why would you spend a day there, doing what?"

"We were releasing animals in the fields around there."

He just laughed. "You four go back down the road a few miles, make sure there are no more. I'll take care of these two." He pulled out an automatic pistol. "Sit down, on the grass." He waved his pistol to the side of the road and the narrow verge between it and the hedge. They both sat carefully as the four soldiers quickly marched away.

"If you are on your way to Whitby it's because of the transmissions. In that case you wouldn't be dawdling about. If you're immune to the transmissions then you know what's going on and would only be heading to Whitby if you were terrorists."

"Seems to me you're the terrorists, herding people to Whitby and imprisoning them there," replied Sean, at last gaining control, at least of his mouth.

"So you are with the rebels, I thought so. Going on a little spying

mission?"

"I'm looking for my children, that's all," said Sean, realising how stupid his last remark had been. He'd been worried about Tanya dropping them in it, but had managed to do that himself with his first words.

"Who told you we were imprisoning people in Whitby?" demanded the soldier, pointing his gun menacingly at them.

"Just people we met on the way," interrupted Tanya, still somehow managing to sound defiant.

"Where are these people, and what are their names?"

A long silence ensued, neither wanting to say more. When the man showed signs of impatience Sean spoke.

"Just people we met on the road, travelling like we are. We don't know their names, or where they are now." The man knew Sean was lying. He had the same abilities as they had. He made it very obvious with his facial expression that he wasn't into playing games. He almost snarled his next words.

"Whether you die hard or easy is up to you. I'll ask you again, where and who?" he stretched out his arm, his gun aimed straight in Sean's face, the muzzle only inches from his nose.

Sean began to sweat and shake. He was about to say something, although he didn't know what, when a brown flash crossed his vision, at the same time the soldier screamed and his gun went flying as he spun round from the impact of a large Alsation like dog clamped to his forearm. He tried to lift his arm and the dog swung underneath, its fangs ripping the flesh. Then the dog shook its head violently and let go, the man dropped to the ground curled up holding his mangled arm. The dog seemed about to attack again and Sean and Tanya jumped up to run, but the dog turned and ran and disappeared almost at once through the hedge.

Sean and Tanya stared after it for a second, then at each other. Noises from the writhing man on the road then drew their attention, and Sean quickly grabbed the gun.

"Shit!" said Tanya, her voice shaking. "I thought he was going to shoot you, but that scared me more than he did. What was it?"

"That was wolf." Stated Sean, almost panting even though he'd done nothing. "He must have followed us. I thought he was a pet but the bloody thing's wild," he said in astonishment.

"That was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen," she said, face white with shock. "I was worried about the dogs before, but after this I'll never look at one the same again. I'll be opening every can of food I can find for them."

"He saved our necks!" said Sean in disbelief.

"He saved yours, for feeding him." Tanya was scanning round as she spoke. Whether she was watching out for more soldiers or the dog she wasn't sure. "What now?"

"I don't know, get out of here I suppose." Sean was also scanning for the soldiers. He couldn't see or hear them but they couldn't be that far

away."What about him. He knows what's going on, could probably tell us about that case as well," said Tanya pointing at the now silent huddled form on the road.

"You mean take him with us? That's a bit awkward. When he gets over the shock he could be dangerous, and I don't much like the idea of pointing the gun at him, in case wolf decides to rip my arm off."

"He was protecting you, he's not likely to rip your arm off, it's what opens the cans for him."

"Maybe, but he could also be some kind of police dog trained to attack anyone pointing a gun."

"We don't have time to worry about this, give me the gun I'll point it at him, you keep an eye out for the dog." Tanya held out her hand.

Sean lifted the gun himself and pointed it at the squirming man, but his eyes were moving everywhere, watching for any signs of the dog. There was no sign. If it was still somewhere near it was well hidden. Sean lowered the gun.

"All right Tanya, see if you can bandage his arm with something, stop the bleeding. If he even looks like he's thinking about trying anything I'll blow his head off."

Tanya went to the man and got hold of his hand. His face was red as a beetroot and screwed up with pain. He was sweating profusely, but he let her straighten his arm a little. As she ripped away the torn material she could see the full extent of the injury. The jaws had clamped like a vice, and then swung round taking the flesh with them and ripping it. If he hadn't tried to pull his arm away from the dog it probably wouldn't have done a lot of damage. As it was she doubted the arm could be saved, even if he got to hospital, which of course he couldn't, there weren't any.

She bound the arm with strips of cloth as best she could but the man remained on the ground in agony.

"There's nothing else I can do for him. That could kill him. He needs medical attention."

Sean glanced down the road where the others had gone. "If we take him to a doctors or hospital could you patch him up."

"He doesn't need first aid. We'll have to leave him, let his men take care of him."

"Tanya I still have to get to Whitby. If he gets there and tells them I'm a rebel, or tells his men, what chance will I have. We can't leave him."

"What do you suggest?"

"We'll take him, as you suggested, and leave a note for his men to stay here. If he dies, tough. He was going to kill us."

"Take him where? Unless you want to kill him we'll have to get him medical attention."

"We've said enough, he's not deaf, or dead yet." Lean back at the roadside house was a doctor, but Sean felt they didn't need to tell this man any more than he already knew, just in case.

Sean wrote a note telling the soldiers to stay there till relieved. He

hoped this might delay them a while. Then they hauled the man onto one of the horses. Sean didn't think the man a danger yet, he was still completely out of it with shock and pain. To be certain he asked Tanya to lead that horse and he'd stay a little way behind with the guns just in case he came round and tried to bolt the horse.

Tanya had difficulty holding the reigns, she was shaking badly.

"Are you all right Tanya?" asked Sean, seeing the shaking.

"I'm scared. I didn't think we were really in any danger, right up to him putting the gun in your face. That shook me, because he really did intend to shoot you, and when the dog attacked I nearly had a heart attack. To see that kind of violence so close nearly made me throw up. If it hadn't been as quick as it was I would have done. The speed and viciousness of both things is only just sinking in. We could have been killed by either, him or the dog."

Sean had been scared from the minute the soldiers appeared. He'd seen violence before directed at him. The dog attack had surprised him, but as the implications sank in it calmed him. Wolf had a lot more power than he'd have ever imagined, to bring a man down that fast, and it was protecting Sean. With a friend like that he couldn't help but feel a little safer.

He'd been very lucky so far. Alcohol had saved his neck the first time, and Wolf the second. He'd have to be more careful in future, he couldn't rely on flukes. He rarely saw the dog, it was probably just chance that it was near, or it might have closed in as they approached the house in anticipation of food. Whatever the case it couldn't be expected to save his skin again.

Tanya led the horse through a gap in the low hedge and began leading the party away from the road. There were numerous small woods and clumps or trees scattered around the fields so they were quickly out of sight of the house. They made a long circle around Malton and eventually joined the Scarborough road. Despite the noise of hooves and their misgivings they used the road as the fastest way back.

The man never really recovered at all from the attack. Loss of blood, shock and infections meant he was almost dead when they finally reached the house after well over a day on the road. Alan came out to meet them when they were fairly near. He'd seen them approach from some distance but had been cautious until they were close enough to recognise. Cath also came out and helped get the horses into the front yard and then get the man into the house.

"A dog attacked him," explained Sean, panting as he helped carry the man through the French windows. "He tried to kill us."

"We'll take him into the back bedroom," replied Alan. "You can explain all this when we get him sorted."

They managed to get him into a bed and Cath began unbinding the arm to see what she could do. The rest went back to the lounge.

"Where are the others?" asked Sean urgently.

"In town, it's a long story, yours looks more urgent."

"They jumped us just outside Malton, four soldiers and this officer. He sent them off to check for any others and then asked us about attacks on

soldiers down here. When we didn't know what he wanted he was going to kill us. A dog attacked him and we escaped. Here we are."

"Wolf attacked him," interrupted Tanya, "to save Sean. As soon as he put his gun in Sean's face the dog hit him, tearing his arm off nearly. He came from nowhere, we hadn't seen him at all, didn't even know he was about."

"Seems you've made a very useful friend I just hope he doesn't mistake any of us for your enemies."

"He knows who the enemies are," said Tanya. "Dogs can tell about people. At first that attack terrified me, but after thinking about it for a while I feel more comfortable about the dogs than I ever did."

"I'm not sure I see the logic there," frowned Alan. "However, the attack the man was asking about was Craig, Robin and Liam. They ran into some soldiers and tried to ambush them. Robin and Craig were wounded, not badly, but they're in the hospital, Lean and Dick are with them. I'll go get Lean back here. We can't stay here long though. We're already packing. They'll be out looking for us. They really have started a war."

"No Alan," said Tanya. "Craig was right about that. The wars been going on for years we just haven't been fighting back. That one was going to kill us. But he did tell us one thing. He sent the others away before he started questioning us seriously. I don't think they knew what was going on. That gives us another weapon, information. If we can recruit some of their soldiers we've got a chance."

Alan obviously didn't think they had any chance, but didn't argue. They were young with the optimism that allowed. He wasn't any more

"What do you two intend to do now?"

"I'm going to Whitby," stated Sean. "It's amazing how hard that's proving to be. It's only sixty miles from home but in two months Malton is as far as I've got."

"We're going to Whitby," corrected Tanya.

"In that case this is yours" Sean handed her the pistol taken from their attacker. "I've still got the one I kept, and I'll be wearing it from now on. It was stashed in my bag when we got stopped."

"That's probably just as well, or we might both be dead." she replied.

"We can't rely on wolf to save us. He's lucky he's not dead. If he'd have attacked while the others were there we'd all be dead."

"We'll get stopped again, and they searched us last time." She replied.

"We weren't being careful, I will be this time. We won't get stopped again because we won't be on the road."

"Maybe we ought to try to coax wolf to come to us," suggested Tanya.

"I think he's best left as he is. He's free and so are we. He'd have been dead if he'd been with us. Besides I don't think he'd make a good pet. Alan, if that man survives please don't let him go, at least till we get back."

"Judging by his current state I don't think he'll be going anywhere for a very long time."

"You're right there," interrupted Cath walking into the lounge. "He

needs urgent medical care or he'll be dead very soon. We can't really move him so maybe you could go and fetch Lean Alan, as soon as possible."

"These two are setting off to Whitby again. I'll go with them as far as York, and get Lean. Will you be all right here by yourself?"

"Yes but don't be long. What happened to him anyway, that looks like a lot more than a dog bite."

"Wolf is a big dog, and he really meant business," answered Tanya. "If we hadn't got up I think he'd have finished him off. Sean picked a good name for him."

"I'll meet you out front," interrupted Alan. "My horse is saddled and ready but he's tied at the back door with the others we were loading." With that Alan went off towards the back of the house.

"Cath be careful with him," warned Tanya. "He was going to kill us in cold blood. Maybe we should stay Sean, till the others get here."

"There's no need at all Tanya," replied Cath. "He's in such a bad state he couldn't overpower a baby, that's if he comes round. He's delirious, completely out of it. You go."

Sean turned and walked through the windows, Tanya hesitated a few seconds but Cath ushered her out. Reluctantly Tanya joined Sean, and a minute later Alan. All three set off at a trot towards York.

It was late afternoon before they cleared York, having parted with Alan in the centre, so they continued along the roads to save time. Travelling steadily they were soon moving through almost pitch black. Sean scanned with his night vision goggles every now and again. Because people stood out so clearly, even at considerable distances, they felt reasonably safe. The four soldiers could still be at the other side of Malton, or they may have gone back to Whitby. It seemed unlikely they would have moved further inland when they had to think their leader had taken his prisoners to Whitby.

Sean and Tanya took to the fields and minor roads, skirting Malton. Sean gave Tanya one of his pairs of night vision goggles and one of them wore them almost continuously when on the move. No people were seen anywhere around Malton, nor were there any around the area the soldiers had been in. They passed by the farm house some distance away, and not long after found themselves on the moors.

Dogs had shown up in the goggles every now and again, some seemed to be following them, but keeping their distance. They had raided one house and put food out, which probably explained most of the dogs, but those following they strongly suspected to be wolf and a few friends. Believing wolf to be with them made them both feel safer, but as they moved onto the moors proper the dogs disappeared.

A small farm in a wooded valley provided good shelter as light crept up from the eastern horizon, and rain clouds began to take shape. The house had been stripped and vandalised but the roof remained intact, protecting them from a light rain lasting most of the morning. They slept in shifts, leaving the horses packed and saddled, but free to roam in an adjacent field.

As evening approached they set off again, keeping a very careful watch ahead. There were no stops this time, and crossing the open moors they soon approached the coast just north of Whitby.

Turning slightly south a short distance inland brought them to the first houses. As they crossed the last road and entered the houses in the north end of Whitby it seemed as deserted as anywhere else. No lights broke the darkness. There were some differences though. All the vehicles were at the side of the road, or off it altogether, leaving the roads open. The houses were all locked, and as far as they could tell none had been vandalised.

They unloaded the horses and set them loose in a fenced field, they hid most of their gear in a house after first breaking in through a back window they hoped wouldn't be noticed. Then they set off into town carrying only their guns and night glasses.

Near the centre of town figures began to glow in the goggles, sentries or guards at main road junctions and some outside larger buildings. They moved as close as they dare and went into a large hotel. From the upper windows they could see quite a bit of the north side of the harbour, but not the harbour or river. Here they settled down to await dawn.

Just after dawn people began moving about, the town seemed to come to life, but no one moved outside the sentries. Boats of various sizes began moving out to sea. Watching these activities gave no clue as to what was going on. It seemed like a normal pre-virus town.

"What now?" asked Tanya, after they'd watched for several hours. "This isn't telling us anything."

"We've got to get among them somehow, talk to them."

"Any ideas how?" she asked casually, perfectly happy to let Sean make the decisions. She had no experience of conflict, and felt out of her depth. Sean had tangled with these soldiers and come out on top. The affair at the farm when they'd both been involved had been solved by his thoughtfulness, befriending a dog.

"A lot of the streets have no guards. It doesn't look like it would be hard to just walk in or out. I wonder why those there don't leave." This wasn't what he'd expected. If it was a prison it was the most casual possible, or perhaps people were held by fear. Fear of being hunted down if they left, and punished in some way for trying to escape.

"Maybe they don't want to. Maybe they're not prisoners."

"How about we sneak in tonight, hide somewhere till everyone's about then join in whatever they're doing. Find out what's going on, why they don't leave. Then we hide till dark and leave the same way."

"Have you worked out any details, such as exactly which streets we use to get in and out, and where we hide." Having deferred to Sean for decisions Tanya wasn't making any.

"Just pick a quiet street, look down there. If we go along that street and through those buildings we're out of sight of all the guards. We can't see down near the harbour but I'm sure we'll find somewhere to hide down there."

"What about the guns?" she asked, weighing hers awkwardly in both

hands.

"I can hide mine in my back holster, probably best to leave yours here."

"Probably best to leave them both here," she suggested, not at all happy around the things. "There are too many to fight."

"A gun can persuade people to do things without making any noise."

Tanya accepted that as reasonable and logical. "All right. I'm going to bed. Wake me when it's time to go."

Getting into the lower part of the town proved to be as easy as it looked. Hiding was even easier, they simply got into an abandoned van. The streets had been cleared, but vehicles not blocking anything were left as they were.

When the noise and movement of people seemed to have reached a reasonable level they left the van and went to where most people seemed to be, near the harbour. People were talking in small groups and moving about almost as they would in any town. The only real difference was that these were all getting supplies.

They were not helping themselves. All the shops had attendants and people paid for things. Tanya stopped one woman.

"We're from out of town. What's going on here? Why do you pay for things when there's such a ridiculous surplus."

The woman glanced round suspiciously, then grabbed Tanya's arm and pulled her towards a crowd. Sean followed nervously.

"Stay in the crowds, they can't read your thoughts so well."

That wasn't a statement they expected, or were prepared for. What had seemed a fairly casual prison had with those few words become very sinister and dangerous. Bot simply stared open mouthed for a few seconds. Tanya recovered first, and spoke almost in a whisper, glancing round at the people around them at the same time.

"Who's they, and what do you mean read your thoughts?"

The woman also glanced around, and spoke very quietly. "The one's in charge, they have machines that can read your thoughts. They have to focus their antenna on you in a crowd though. If you're by yourself they pick thoughts up in aials scattered about. If you came in by yourself get out as fast as you can. They'll pick you up very quickly, and you'll be prisoners like the rest of us."

"What's keeping you here?" demanded Sean, finding himself inexplicably angry. "There are only a few guards, you could easily overpower them, or sneak past them as we did."

"They trigger the virus if we try to leave. We all have it, but they somehow stop it triggering."

"They control the virus!" exclaimed Sean, loud enough for those nearby to turn to them.

"Keep your voice down, there are spies everywhere. They've brought people back who've left, all cabbages. They put them over there by the bridge

till they die. There are none there today because no one's tried to leave for a few days."

"So are they saving you from the virus by keeping you here, or using it as a weapon to keep you here?" asked Tanya.

"We don't know, but we are trapped here. The houses we have to use are full of electronic equipment. They control our sleeping. They control our digestion, they keep us weak and tired. They send instructions directly to our brains, if we disobey we're tortured with the electronics. They keep us drugged and our body temperatures down. They get electricity from that generator ship the other side of the bridge. There's power in all the lower houses. That's all I can tell you. Stay in the crowds and then get out as soon as you can."

"Wait!" snapped Sean as the woman turned to leave. "I'm here to find my children. I haven't seen any so far, where are they?"

"All the families with children are on the south side. Any orphans are taken in by them." With that she rushed off, giving Sean no chance to ask further questions.

"Sean I'm scared, lets get back to the van. I don't want to get stuck here."

"I've got to look for Rob and Sue."

"Look over the the river, there are hardly any people, and how are you going to find them. There might be hundreds of families. You can't just go knocking on doors. We have to get out of here, get what we know back to the others."

Sean stared across the harbour. She was right, there were very few people there on the streets. There were crowds here because this is where the shops were. He didn't want to admit defeat now though, and was torn between fear of getting caught and responsibility for his children.

"They're being looked after, what could you do for them if you find them. You can't risk taking them away from here after what that woman said, and we can't risk staying. Sean I'm scared, I can sense the fear all around and it's affecting me."

Sean continued staring across the harbour, but the people were beginning to thin a little just where they were. "All right, but we can't leave yet. We might be safer staying among the other people as long as we can." Sean was reluctant to leave despite his own fear. He felt while ever he was here there was just the remote chance that he might see his children. They moved towards the sea a little to stay with the crowd and Sean leant on a lamp post. He suddenly jerked his hand away. "It's vibrating!" he backed away from it. "I could feel a kind of tingling in the post."

"Sean I really am scared, lets get out now. There are no guards during the day either. We could still get out unseen." Tanya was near panic. The people around her were affecting her, as well as her own survival instincts. The thought of being trapped and controlled by someone almost overpowered her.

Sean was surprised when he looked at her and saw the fear. He could sense just how strong it was, almost feel her fear himself. Although not really

a believer in telepathy he did believe that a deathly fear such as hers should be taken seriously. He didn't really have the same fear for himself. He'd already died, several times, but he felt responsible for Tanya. "All right, lets go."

Up the steep narrow streets away from the harbour there were less people, but still enough to feel safe. As they struggled higher the shops gave way to hotels and residences. The residences were occupied, and so were some of the hotels, but there were less people on the streets. Soon they came to the first of the totally deserted streets leading to the north and unoccupied part of town. As soon as they turned into this street people stopped and watched.

They were both soon very aware of the attention they were getting from those they were leaving behind, but they had nowhere to hide. All they could do was keep moving until they could get out of sight. A cross street some way ahead became their target. Once they reached it they would be out of sight and could run. They quickened the pace, all the time glancing back at the ever growing crowd at the end.

A man in a soldiers uniform appeared from the cross street ahead, stopping them dead. He walked quickly towards them, his rifle held loosely in one hand, the other up in a halting gesture. Sean's stomach began to churn, should he go for his gun. Could he get it out and scare the soldier or would the soldier shoot them. He had to do something but he was terrified.

Tanya was shaking, and white as a sheet. She grabbed Sean's hand, an unspoken plea on her face for him to do something. As soon as Sean felt her shaking he made up his mind. He'd kill this man if he had to, but they weren't going to be taken.

"You can't come up here, you have to stay in the protected areas." His voice wasn't aggressive, or even assertive. He actually sounded a little unsure, he was stopping people straying, not confining prisoners. Sean put this attitude down to overconfidence. They had things so much under control they couldn't conceive of people escaping, or the soldier was protecting people because they'd die if they left. Whatever the case Sean had no time or inclination to find out. He quickly pulled out his gun pointing at the soldier only ten feet away. Now it was the soldier's turn to stop dead, his face showing shocked horror at facing a weapon.

"Steady on, no need for that." he dropped his rifle on the floor and raised his hands. "You'll die if you leave, you know that, but I'm not going to stop you. If you want to commit suicide then go ahead." He stepped aside, away from his rifle.

This was too easy. Sean didn't know what to do. There were perhaps thirty people down at the end of the street watching this, but no one seemed to be doing anything. Was this a trap? He couldn't think, and just stared at the soldier.

Tanya didn't care how easy it was, or who was watching. She saw a way of escape and instantly went for it. She ran forward past the soldier then turned urgently to Sean who was still hesitating.

"Come on!" she snapped, waving him forward frantically.

Sean woke up, and raced after her, into the cross street out of sight of

the crowd and the soldier. Then they ran as fast as they could taking the next street north, then the next east and then north again. They felt safer at each turn they made, and soon reached the hotel they'd used, without any further encounters. They raced up the stairs to their room. A quick glance from the window told them they were in trouble. A group of soldiers were coming up from the town centre, still some way away but moving quickly.

Tanya grabbed her gun and they both raced back down and onto what they hoped would be quiet streets. They sprinted back out of town, always keeping buildings between them and anyone following. Once they reached the field where the horses were they retrieved their saddles and hurriedly packed up the animals. Then it was a mad race directly north initially away from the houses, then back across farm fields towards the moors.

Hedges, woods and hills gave good cover for several miles. They felt reasonably safe, and allowed the horses to walk for long periods, galloping them only across open spaces.

When the landscape changed to moorland they felt much more exposed. Uneven ground, potholes and rocks made travel slow and dangerous, so they moved back to the road. Now they pushed the horses hard, fearing every second vehicles of some kind appearing behind.

After several hours they came back into farmland. The horses were exhausted, and so were they. Dismounting and walking the horses they moved off the road and took to fields and farm tracks. Travelling parallel to the road but some distance from it Sean felt compelled to take a short rest, for the sake of the horses if nothing else. He stopped at a hedge and sat down.

"What are you doing?" demanded Tanya, scanning in all directions nervously.

"We'll have to give the horses a break or we'll kill them."

"Not yet, we're still in danger. I can feel them nearby, looking for us."

"Tanya we're miles away. They won't be looking for us out here.

We're off the road so we can rest the horses till dark and then..."

A shot rang out, very loud, from the road a few hundred yards away. Neither heard the bullet but it had obviously been aimed at them. They both jumped on their horses and instantly kicked flat out. Racing along the hedge they quickly approached a farm track crossing their current path but heading away from the road. A hedge along the far side meant they had to take the track. Making a curve as they neared it they hoped to join it without slowing. Two shots rang out, both fired in the air by one of four soldiers only twenty yards along the track from where they joined it. The other three had rifles levelled at them. They quickly pulled up the horses.

"Get down!" demanded the one who'd fired in the air. He only had a pistol, and it was pointed at them. His voice was very sure and assertive. He meant business and Sean instinctively knew he'd kill them without hesitation unless they complied.

Tanya glanced at Sean, panic on her face. She almost seemed ready to try to run for it, and might have done except the defeat on Sean's face stopped her. It would have been futile, they were only thirty feet away.

They dismounted obediently. The soldiers came over and one frisked them, taking Tanya's gun, but not finding Sean's tucked in the small of his back.

"You three backtrack them, see if there's any signs of others. Go a few miles back up the road, find where they left it. Take Johnson with you, and tell him not to fire in our direction again. He could have hit one of us."

Exactly the same scenario was being played out again. This must be a standard procedure when picking up people who may know something, to prevent any chance of them saying something that might turn the ordinary soldiers. Tanya was shaking, and so was Sean. They both knew what was coming.

"You don't have long," he said, turning his attention to them as soon as the others were out of earshot. "Tell me what you were doing and on who's behalf. If you're convincing enough and have enough to say you might make this last till they get back. At the first pause or hint of a lie I'll kill both of you."

Sean glanced round, but there was no sign of any dogs. If wolf had followed them they'd probably lost him in their race from town.

"No good looking round. There's no one here to help you. We've got this whole area to ourselves." As he said whole area he waived his arms out. While his gun was pointing at the distant horizon Sean grabbed for his own gun and pulled it out, it was pointing in the man's face before he'd brought his back in. Surprise was total, in all three, but Sean recovered quickly.

"Any move other than letting go of that gun will be fatal." Sean couldn't believe he'd managed to grab his gun so quickly. He'd never practised getting it out quick, but the fact that he'd managed gave him considerable confidence. The arrogance was wiped from the face of their captor.

"You can't fire, my men would be back in a minute." He spoke nervously, completely shaken by the turn of fortunes, and his own misjudgement.

"If this gun goes off so does your head. This is an all or nothing game. We all survive or you'll never know whether we did or not."

Sean was terrified and shaking like a leaf, as was the gun. It was only a few feet from the man's face though, so even with the shake he wasn't likely to miss. He was shaking badly enough that he might fire it by accident. Sean was in no way bluffing, and the man knew that, but still didn't let go of his weapon.

"You don't have a lot of time," said Sean, slowly calming. Still the man held onto his gun.

"Tanya, get ready to jump on that horse and ride like hell. Five, four," the man let go of the gun. Sean released the tension on the trigger. He'd fully intended firing on three.

Tanya quickly dived down and grabbed the gun, then holding it with both hands pointed it at him.

"What now?" asked the man defiantly. "My men will be back shortly."

"We won't be here," replied Sean. "Start walking, that way," Sean stepped back and indicated the track away from the road. "Make it a fast walk."

"This is pointless, you can't get away."

Sean gestured to Tanya to mount up, then he climbed to his horse. "If you don't get moving now you never will."

The man smiled, then shrugged and set off down the track. Sean kicked his horse forward and followed closely, his gun never leaving the man's back.

"You won't get away, you know that. They'll come looking for you the instant they find me missing."

"It took us about ten minutes from where we left the road, it will take your men at least five each way, maybe ten. In the next few minutes you have to decide how fast and far you can run, and I have to decide whether it's far and fast enough. At this moment your men are still going the wrong way, so I'm not going to fire this gun without good reason. In a few minutes they'll have got as far away as they're going to. At that time I've nothing to loose, they'll be coming this way anyway. Your survival depends entirely on us getting away. Start running."

He hesitated a few seconds, but not as long as Sean feared he might. To some extent he'd accepted defeat, which surprised Sean. Either that or he was confident of them being overtaken or intercepted. He began jogging, quite quickly. He moved fast enough so the horses had to trot to keep up. Sean kept looking back, but even though the country was fairly open he could see no sign of pursuit.

When the track entered a farm others left in various directions, one west, so they took to that one. That soon ended in a field, so they simply kept heading west until a large hedge stopped them. The man got a rest while Sean threw a rope round part of it and his horse pulled it down. Then off they went again.

Several fields and hedges were crossed but after a few miles the man slowed markedly. He was panting heavily, and probably not faking it. That run would have killed Sean. The problem was they'd left a trail of broken hedges an idiot could follow, and couldn't afford to stop to let him rest.

They were now close to a road and a small garage gave Sean an Idea.

"Head for that garage," he ordered.

"You might as well let me go now," panted the man. "I can't warn them for some time, and I'd only slow you down. I can't run any further."

"Tanya go ahead, see if you can find duct tape or something to tie him up with. I'm not risking letting him loose so he can run back to meet them."

They'd just come to a gate onto the road, Tanya raced through it and along the road, the man fell on the gate, exhausted.

"If you tie me up and they don't find me I'll die," he gasped. Sean kept his distance, not taking any chances that he was faking it.

"That wouldn't particularly worry me, but I'm sure they'll come to the

garage, there's a path right through all the hedges to here." Sean felt it wise not to let on that his plans didn't include leaving him out here at all.

Tanya came racing back in minutes, a large roll of tape in her hand.

"Put your hands behind your back. Tanya tape his wrists tightly, but don't get in the way, just in case he tries anything.

He cooperated, putting his hands behind while still leaning on the gate with his chest. Tanya taped his wrists very securely.

"Can you take him behind you, you're a lot lighter than me. We'll try to find fresh horses once we get a bit further away. These two can't go much further without rest, and we'll have to run them for a while."

"We have planes and helicopters. How do you expect to get away with kidnapping me," he sputtered, realising they weren't letting him go.

"Even if you had somebody willing to fly a plane I doubt any of those on the ground would allow it. All planes were banned, and most immobilised months ago, while we still had a civilisation. Besides they won't know what happened to you. They might think you helped us escape."

"They know better than that. They'll be on you in no time."

"Not unless they have legs as long as these horses," replied Sean jumping down. "This is going to be a long trip, you can tell us something useful, keep quiet or have your mouth taped. Up to you."

Sean grabbed his arms. "Get up Tanya."

She mounted the horse then between them they struggled the man up behind her and taped him to her. Sean mounted and they set off at a gallop down the road, Tanya and the man wobbling about dangerously, but somehow staying on.

A combination of gallops and short walks to let the horses catch their breath got them to Malton before nightfall. They could only afford a short rest and food, but the horses couldn't be driven further. Both were turned loose in the fields but there were no other horses around. They had to dump the saddles and continue on foot. From here they would use fields and farm tracks all the way, staying well away from any roads. As most of their journey would be in the dark they felt they'd be reasonably safe.

It was early morning when they finally reached the roadside house. Their night's walk had been without incident, but they were exhausted. Craig was there to meet them. The house was abandoned now, except for one person always there as sentry because it had such a good field of view. He walked with a slight limp, but seemed more confident than ever.

"If you two keep bringing them back like this it'll solve all the problems," said Craig, not masking the awe in his voice.

"We were lucky, again. We got into Whitby, they're all under some kind of mind control. He's told us nothing so far. What about the other?" asked Sean.

"No luck there either. He went off last night."

A stunned silence followed his words. Both Sean and Tanya had almost forgotten about the virus. Sean automatically glanced at his watch, getting a very queasy feeling. It was a few minutes to nine. He forced himself

to look away, ignore it.

"We're no better off now than we were," said Sean, forcing his depressed mind to keep functioning. He was getting good at it, had had plenty of practice. "Unless you can get this one to tell us something."

The man stood defiantly, not beaten at all, merely inconvenienced by this temporary capture. His stance made it clear he wasn't going to be very forthcoming.

"Didn't you find out anything more specific, such as how they're controlled, how many there are?" asked Craig, feeling a little frustrated with what they'd got.

"Not much of any use. A woman told us they used electronic devices to torture them in their own houses. Said they could read your thoughts. I figure there are a few thousand people in Whitby, but not many like him, those in charge. Maybe ten percent at most. At least half are civilians, no controllers among them that we saw. Although we didn't see that many, if you figure on as many soldiers then that makes one to two thousand. They are always in groups of four or five with one in charge, that's two to four hundred like him."

"Electronic devices like the suitcase?" asked Craig hopefully.

"Maybe, but it also has something to do with the street lamps. I touched one and it was vibrating. It felt unpleasant," said Sean, frowning. It didn't make any sense at all to him. Maybe it just felt unpleasant because it was unexpected and he was scared.

"Metal lamps?" asked Craig.

"Yes, why?"

"There's a place not far from here, a small town, where all the metal lamps have been cut down, but none of the concrete ones. We thought it was just somebody gone crazy, but suddenly it seems this might be worth looking into. If somebody knows something about lamps then maybe they know a lot more."

"That could just be coincidence," replied Sean. "First thing we have to do is take care of our guest here, then we need some rest, badly."

"I can take him back to the new place, if you two go and see if you can find the one cutting down lamps. I'd go but I've been up all night on watch and my leg is very sore. It's not far from here, but quite a distance from our new base."

"We've been up two nights and days," replied Sean, almost falling asleep as he stood.

"You take him to the new place and we'll rest here," suggested Tanya, looking at Sean for approval. "Then we'll go check it out. Where is it?"

"Straight back down the road, about six miles. You can't miss it."

"Al right, you take him and we'll get some sleep, then go."

"It's not safe to sleep here with no one on watch," replied Craig.

Tanya turned to Sean. "Can you make six more miles?"

"Not on foot!"

"There's plenty of saddles in the outhouse, and horses in half the fields out back," Craig informed them.

Sean sighed. "If we're going we'd better go now, because if I sit down I won't get up."

"Come on then, lets round us up some horses," said Tanya lightly. Sean smiled, as usual being infected by her cheerfulness, and it was past the hour.

chap08

"What are you talking about!" shouted Chantry, completely losing control. Actin had just come to his cabin to inform him that another of the patrol leaders had disappeared, and this time it seemed certain he'd been captured and taken away. This was the second one in a few days.

"The people that were here in town, they were intercepted near Malton, but then disappeared, the leader with them. The other soldiers followed the trail they left as far as they could but then lost it. They think they were headed towards York."

Chantry couldn't breath. This had been the worst week of his life. First a patrol had been attacked near York, then the next day two people are intercepted by a patrol near Malton and escape taking the leader with them. Now two people had actually entered town, talked to the people, wondered around at will, and left when they felt like it, in broad daylight. And now Actin was saying they'd been intercepted by a patrol and captured it's leader.

This all sounded too ridiculous. Two people capturing so many, coming to town. They had to have help, or was he being betrayed by his own people, the patrol leaders. Had they gone off with the couple voluntarily, had they helped them into and out of town. Was his army controlled by someone else.

"Is this all done by the same two people?" Asked Chantry, regaining a little of his composure. He'd been virtually asleep, even though it was only early evening. Actin's visit had been a very rude awakening.

"The descriptions are similar. A man and woman both about thirty, both slim, the man about six feet and woman five eight or nine. Both with brown hair. I've arranged for collection of CCTV tapes to see if we can identify them, but that will take some time. Moran and a few others are going through the tapes as we get them."

"All right, thank you tribune Actin. Let me know if you find anything. I'll be up later, just give me a little time to get myself together." he moved to the door and opened it, inviting Actin out. Chantry was almost panicking. He had links to every camera but the recording capability on board wasn't that great, pictures were only kept a few hours before they had to be overwritten. He needed to get his computer up so he could study the films himself before that happened, see who they'd talked to, which tribune was helping them.

Chantry was prepared to spend the night studying the films but it turned out much easier. The first film he looked at showed the two near the ship, among a few dozen others. This was from a camera on the ship and he didn't even need to enhance the high quality picture to recognise them, the faces were clearly visible. One jumped out at him as soon as the film ran, the face from the suitcase camera, the one who'd captured an agent months ago. He'd been no more than thirty or forty feet from the ship, and he was armed. Chantry may even have been on deck.

A sickness built up in his stomach, almost causing him to throw up. He could have been killed. Probably the only reason he wasn't is that the man hadn't seen his face, only a mask. It was almost certain he would have now. Perhaps that's all he came for, to identify Chantry, perhaps see if he could be captured, like he seemed able to capture everyone else he wanted.

Despite his sickness Chantry managed to follow the couple from their appearance, in the centre that morning to their leaving after about 1/2 hour. They'd entered during the night, but with most of the street lamps turned off hadn't been picked up on any cameras. He lost them as they left the town centre. They hadn't talked to any tribune, unless that had been done at night. That's what he had to assume. The secret elite had outsmarted him again. He felt trapped. He not only couldn't leave the ship, it could be dangerous to leave his cabin. If the two had waited till dark they could have left the way they entered and no one would have been any wiser. As it was they'd left making sure they were noticed. Were there others here, not under his control, hiding or rather living in un-wired houses, blocking the brainwave receivers somehow, or avoiding them. Did the other elite have control of the army, his army, as well as the rogues outside.

Chantry was in an impossible situation. He couldn't trust anyone. There were a few of the patrol leaders he was sure of, but he dare not trust even them. This shouldn't be happening, he had all the power. How could anyone control those he was watching or controlling without him knowing. It was impossible, but it was happening.

Many other impossible things had happened. The virus protection devices didn't work properly. He knew what kind of testing would have been done on such devices, they would have been proven beyond any doubt to be one hundred percent effective and reliable, but they'd failed to protect. And the virus itself. The satellite would have been made incapable of sweeping the surface, yet it had, and still was. There should have been all kinds of fail safes to kill it if it went wrong, but there weren't or they didn't work. This had to be

planned, it couldn't possibly have happened by chance.

The elite hiding among his lieutenants had to be some kind of super elite, or some of the old elite had got together to do this, and chantry had been excluded. They would have built their own protection, and be waiting there for whatever purpose they had in mind. Chantry had probably been expected to die with the others not included, but he'd foiled them by being on this ship.

He could easily go mad thinking of all the possibilities. He had to focus on facts. A man and woman had taken several of his patrol leaders captive, but had not taken the soldiers. They had entered town and left at will. There was a disturbance on the higher levels which could only really be the accessing of those levels by other people, either elite who'd been inactive since the disaster or rogues just learning of those levels. Worst of all someone knew Chantry was involved in whatever was going on here.

His options seemed limited. As things were he had no control and no freedom of action. He was in a prison just as restricting as any other that had ever existed. He was a trapped animal. He started thinking about what it would take to up anchor and sail away. He could stay at sea for months, then shut down the satellite and land somewhere anonymously, join the survivors. Play the part of a rogue perhaps. All those in Whitby would succumb to the virus, and he could sink the ship, or hide it. There would be nothing to connect him to security organisations of any kind. If he was careful he should be able to take control in time, or if the worst came to the worst live a normal life in whatever society emerged.

He'd need several weeks to ready the ship for sea. He needed a small crew. It could be sailed by one person in calm water and if nothing went wrong, as he had done in bringing it into harbour. He'd been the only one on board apart from a woman when this hit. The boat had been anchored twenty miles up the coast just off shore, the normal crew he'd sent ashore for a few days while he spent time alone with a woman he'd met and taken a liking to. She'd eventually left in the dingy, leaving chantry stranded on board when the crew didn't return.

Only a few days later he got the news of the virus. He asked for a new crew, and one was promised but then things got gradually worse, and after several weeks alone he got the news that the protection devices didn't work, and that attempts at shutting down the satellite had failed. He was told to shut it down from the ship, but he didn't have that capability at the time.

More days passed as he learnt to program the computer to shut it down, but by then it was too late. He spent more time learning to run the ship, and managed to get it here, but sailing out again, and into the ocean proper he didn't relish trying alone.

What a disaster. How could things possibly have got this bad. Who could he trust as crew. Two of the rogue children were about twelve, but the other two were only about ten. Could he possibly risk sailing with them. He could learn whatever he needed to, and give simple instructions. A glimmer of light shone through the darkness. It would be possible, and they'd be easy to dispose of later. That would have to be his first task, send for the children and

get them living on board, teach them what he could about running the ship. Then he'd get food and whatever other supplies were needed. He'd have to modify the fuel lines to shore so he could easily disconnect them, and the power feed lines, but that shouldn't be too difficult. The only serious problem would be raising the road bridge.

He went up to the ship's bridge feeling much better than he had for a while. There were only a few people there, Actin was among them.

"Tribune Actin, these two intruders worry me. I think it might be prudent to limit access around town at night as much as possible. After curfew block as many streets as possible with vehicles, raise the road bridge, that will stop anyone coming in from the south. Make it impossible to move around at night, except of course the routes you and the other tribunes need open."

"Raising the bridge cuts the town in half!" Protested Actin, very strongly. Strong enough to surprise Chantry. Why should Actin care. There were only the families with children and the orphans over the other side.

"I can't see how it would cause any problems," replied Chantry. "No one is supposed to cross it anyway after dark."

"There are often problems with the children, health and such. They even set fire to one of the houses one night. We have to have access."

"All right, why don't we bring all the children over this side, board them with the adults over here. If everyone took one or two there'd be no problem. That way we could pull in guards from the south side, station them this side. I could look after three or four children on the ship."

"We'd have to power some more houses up on this side?"

"We can do that. They were only placed over there because there were so many at one time, but they're better off as families, the children and adults. It's more natural."

"Do you really feel that unsafe?"

"Yes I do. If people can walk into town at will, and out again, everyone's going to know what we're doing here. You and I know it's for the general good but it might not seem that way to those outside. They may decide to use the arms they've apparently got to stop us. We don't have enough men to protect the whole town, but with the river as a barrier at one side we only need half as many men to guard this half."

Actin reluctantly agreed, and left to arrange the moves. Chantry returned to his cabin, Actin's reaction worrying him. Did he actually care about the children? That seemed unlikely. Was he reluctant to have the bridge raised? Why? He couldn't possibly suspect Chantry intended to take the ship out condemning all of them...could he? He'd have to watch Actin very carefully from now on, he might decide to do something drastic, or he might be made to. By taking these actions Chantry might have upset whatever plans were afoot. He might unknowingly be forcing their hand. He needed to build some kind of defence, rig the ship so that if any harm came to him the protection turned off. It must also be known that this existed to be any kind of defence.

The freedom of information in America has allowed many victims to get proof of their involvement in mind control experiments and sue the governments of both America and Canada. In Britain this has not been possible. The recently passed freedom of information bill does not allow access to any documents deemed to be related to national security, which means the security services release only things they wish to release.

chap09

They knew they were in the right area when they came across a gap in a line of pylons. Four or five pylons were missing. Wires from each of the remaining end pylons simply hung to the ground at one side, but were still strung at the other.

Missing lamps were not so obvious. When Craig had seen the downed lamps some weeks earlier they were lying where they fell, now all had gone. Concrete lamps were still there, and there didn't really seem to be any gaps, but as they got closer metal stumps could be seen here and there.

"Well this is the town, how do we find whoever it is that dislikes metal lamps," asked Tanya.

"Look for a large pile of lamps," suggested Sean.

"This is a fairly big town," said Tanya thoughtfully, ignoring his remark. "They haven't cut all the pylons down, just those here, so they probably haven't cut all the lamps down, it would take forever. They must be in this area. Which house would you live in?" she asked, scanning round the estate.

Sean also looked around at the houses. "None of these Holmes," he said sarcastically "I'd pick one in the open with a view of the river. It's only a few hundred metres away but you can't see it from the road. Over that way."

Sean set off down a street at right angles to the main road, and Tanya followed.

"Of course your deductions may be wrong, but if they are in this area this would be the obvious place."

They soon came to the end of the houses, but in a field beyond on the hillside facing the river was a large white house.

"Ah, a big house with it's own grounds," remarked Tanya as it came into view. "And take note Watson there are no lamps near."

"Yes," smiled Sean, pleased at how easily she picked up the game.

"Good views away from town, and far enough out of the way not to be noticed."

"You must have noticed it sometime, to know it's here."

"We used to come up here and play along the river when I was a kid." Said Sean. "If you're on the river bank you can't really miss it."

"How do we approach?" asked Tanya a little more seriously. "Just ride up and ring the front door bell."

"We might as well. If somebody is living there you can bet they keep some kind of watch. They'd have seen us by now I should think."

A large fenced area surrounded the house, which was set some distance from the small road running across the top of the hill. Poplars and other tall bushes were planted along the fence as it ran beside the road, partially obscuring the view of the house. The fence and hedge curved from the road along the entrance drive to large gates barring entrance.

Sean kicked his horse forward and turned down towards the gate, a man, probably in his fifties, appeared just the other side, with a rifle. It wasn't aimed at them, just held casually in front but the angle he stood at, not quite facing them, meant the muzzle pointed their way.

"This house is occupied," came the none too friendly statement in way of greeting.

They both stopped some way short of the gate, a little surprised. Most people were a little wary, but outright hostility was unusual. The gun left no doubt at all that guests weren't welcome.

"We were hoping it was," answered Sean, feeling very nervous. This man looked comfortable with the weapon. The casual way he held it suggested familiarity with it, and threat to them. "We're looking for whoever it is that cuts down lamps?"

"Who wants to know, and why?" His attitude now seemed decidedly unfriendly, suspicious.

Sean probably sounded like a policeman investigating a crime, although he certainly hadn't wanted to make that impression. The man turned slightly as he spoke, causing the gun to swing a little more their way. The situation was definitely getting serious, and Sean rushed to explain.

"I'm Sean, this is Tanya. We've had a little trouble with soldiers, especially in Whitby. It seems they make use of metal lamps, other than for lighting the streets. We're trying to find out exactly what they use them for. Your dislike of lamps made us think that perhaps you knew something about them."

"How did you find this place?" he asked, his voice very slightly softer, but still aggressive

"Easiest thing on Earth. We just looked for the place we'd choose," replied Sean. "I knew about this house being here from when I was a kid, just figured it's the one I'd live in."

He smiled at that, but still didn't really relax at all.

"You say you've been to Whitby. How did you escape, or did they let you go, or send you to find me?"

That sounded a little paranoid, or very hopeful. If he was important enough to send out people to find him then they really did need to talk to him. On the other hand if he only thought he was that important they might be in trouble.

"We really did escape, but we weren't there long, only a few hours, that was yesterday. We went to find out what was going on but didn't really find out much, except that people were held there against their will."

"You didn't need to go there to find that out, it's common knowledge," he replied sceptically

"We found a lot more out!" snapped Tanya, feeling Sean was handling this all wrong. "We know how they're kept there. We know about the mind control and thought reading, and torture. Nobody else knew about any of that."

He smiled at her. "That's not quite true, but I must admit I'd like to have gone myself. What did you find out about metal lamps to bring you here?"

"They vibrate?" answered Sean. "And they give you a very unpleasant feeling."

He stood in thought for a moment, then moved the rifle to one hand and moved to the gate, unlatching it and swinging it open.

"I'm just about to have lunch, you can join me if you want. Leave your things on the porch and let the horses loose inside the gate."

He watched them carefully as they walked their horses through the gates and closed them. He didn't move as they went to the porch and unsaddled the horses. Only when he was sure they weren't armed did he also move to the house and open the door for them. He ushered them inside and guided them into the dining room.

"Wait in here and I'll get the food."

Tanya and Sean seated themselves at the table, the man watched from the doorway. As soon as they were settled he backed out closing the door.

"He's very wary," said Tanya. "Do you think he's all right He thinks they're after him personally."

"Maybe they are," replied Sean. "I don't know what's going on or why. Everyone seems to have different information, they all have little bits but nobody knows the whole thing. That woman believed they could in some way control the virus. The implications there are staggering."

"None of that has anything to do with our friend here," argued Tanya.

"Maybe he knows something about them," replied Sean. "Maybe they're after him to stop him telling anyone else about lamps or something. We'll just have to wait and see what he says. If he is nuts we'll just be polite and leave as soon as we can."

"Perhaps we shouldn't have come," replied Tanya thoughtfully. "If they really are after him we might be putting ourselves in danger."

"They are after me personally," he said as he walked back in carrying a tray with three plastic packs on it. "Don't ask me why because I'm not sure. They've been screwing up my life since I was a small child."

This definitely sounded like paranoia, and both felt a little uncomfortable, not quite sure what to say. The plastic packs were instant meals. He passed them out. Getting the tops off proved quite difficult, and the effort and concentration needed delayed any response they felt obliged to make. Their minds were so preoccupied with the meals and his paranoia that neither of them attached any significance to them being hot.

After eating in silence for some time, Tanya finally managed to form a question she hoped wouldn't be too insulting or patronising.

"How have they been screwing up your life, mister....?"

"My name's Barry Pulik, and that's a very big question. Before I explain perhaps you should tell your own stories, what strange circumstances led to your being here at this time."

The way he said 'at this time' implied some significance in the timing. What that could possibly be eluded Sean. He decided for the moment to let it go. The man was suspicious, which was understandable in a way, so Sean decided to tell his tale.

"We went to Whitby mainly to find my children, who I've been looking for since my wife died. We got in easily enough, dodging round the sentries. We mixed with the people there and talked to one woman who told us about mind control, electronic torture and all kinds of things. We got scared because everyone else was, and left straight away, as the woman recommended. We had some trouble leaving but we were very lucky."

"Not just luck!" interrupted Tanya, annoyed that Sean was making light of his own efforts. "Sean captured one of their officers, he's now being held by some friends. That's the second one he's captured."

"Impressive," he remarked, raising his eyebrows. "So you escaped from Whitby with one of them, what happened next."

"We handed him over to someone we know," continued Sean, being just a little cautious in giving any information about the others. "The one we gave our prisoner to had seen the downed lamps here, and suggested it might be worth while finding whoever was doing it. It seemed like too much of a coincidence that someone just happened to dislike lamps, so here we are."

"Interesting story, did you get anything out of the two you captured?"

"No," replied Sean, suddenly getting a tight feeling in his stomach. "The first was badly injured and wasn't in any state to tell us much. He went off before he recovered. The other didn't tell us anything of any use, but the others have him, maybe they'll get something out of him."

"What about the lamps?" interrupted Tanya, her impatience getting the better of her. She was very tired and wanted to get this over with so she could sleep.

"The lamps are basically aerials. All cars are electronic now, so by sending power to the lamps at certain frequencies and voltages they can transmit some kind of field that interrupts the electronics. They can stop any or all cars."

"Why were they vibrating in Whitby, there are no cars?" asked Sean, feeling that explanation totally inadequate.

"It's not only cars that can be affected by electromagnetic signals. If the lamps are highly charged they cause ionization. That affects people directly. It can cause feelings of well being or relaxation if negative, if positive it causes tiredness, depression and many other unpleasant effects, if strong enough it can knock people out, or worse. That's obviously what the lamp you touched was doing, depressing people."

"Why depress people?" Sean couldn't believe something as common as a lamp could be used against people. If he hadn't felt the vibration and the unpleasantness of touching it he'd have laughed at this.

"I don't know. They've been doing that to me and thousands or even millions of others for fifty years or more. The only thing I've been able to think of is it makes people more susceptible to suggestion, because it also makes you nervous and afraid."

"How could anybody do this? It would involve thousands of people, ordinary workers who take care of the lamps."

"When the secret services do things it often involves a lot of people. They're either fooled or told to keep quiet because it's a matter of national security."

"What about the government, surely they couldn't risk something like this going on."

"The weapons I know of that have been used on me are: microwave weapons, beams and masers. They affect the body and mind in thousands of ways depending on frequency, charge and strength. We have recent laws that allow us to be exposed to many times the microwave limits of other countries. Ionizers, I've already explained about them. There are no laws limiting exposure in this country. Microwaves can be used to cause ionization, induce positive or negative charges in any part of the body. This is used to control pain, make a scratch feel like your arms ripped open or if it is ripped open make it feel like a scratch. The first effect is used extensively, the second rarely, and then only to hide some major problem, prevent it being treated. You could have lung cancer developing for years and never know, till it was too late to do anything about it. Then it could give you so much pain you'd commit suicide before anyone had chance to do anything about it.

To hit you in your home they need to be able to see you. Walls are transparent to microwave spying devices. We have no laws of privacy. Anyone with the technology can watch you all the time. Electronic miniaturisation makes all such devices portable and cheap, especially if they're mass produced in special factories. Computers make watching even millions practical, and as far as the phones go it's common knowledge that all calls are vetted, firstly by computers looking for key words or voices etc., then by people if they're of interest.

Drugs and chemicals, so long as they do you no damage there's no law against exposing you to them. Give someone a mild antidepressant for a long enough period of time and they become addicted, then withdraw it. The effects can be devastating, panic attacks, virtual insanity, especially if your doctors in on it. Psychological warfare, again no specific laws, and in this

country if it isn't proscribed in law it's legal. Sleep deprivation is the favourite, they use neighbours as well as electronic devices and drugs. That's illegal under all international laws, but not British law.

That's just the tip of the iceberg. These and many more things were used on people on a daily basis, the government passed laws allowing all this, or avoided passing laws which would interfere with it, all governments."

"This is all too far fetched," protested Sean. "What evidence is there for any of this."

"Very little, it's not hard for such powerful organisations to leave none. But think about it. Metal lamps to start with. Did you notice that most lamps were concrete, then suddenly in the late nineties metal lamps appeared everywhere. Every junction has one, every street has one, and they are often just extra, not replacing a broken concrete one."

"There are forced to be MPs that wouldn't accept this."

"They either don't know or are given the standard explanation. It's a precaution against a meteor strike, to maintain public order in case of some catastrophe."

"This is all hard to swallow," said Sean sceptically. He looked at Tanya for support but she looked very thoughtful.

"What do you know about the mind control programs."

"Not much, except they're a way of controlling people through controlling their subconscious. They do that using the things I've talked about."

"What about telepathy?"

"I don't know, what about it?"

"It's mixed in with all this, as far as I've been told the main part. All you've said they do could just be to prevent people using or learning about it."

"As I said I don't know, I'm not telepathic."

"Yes you are, we all are. It's been hidden from the general population and used against them. We all have the ability to speak a language, but if you'd been brought up in silence you'd never know language existed. That's how it is with telepathy. They gag everyone from birth virtually, and discredit any that learn by themselves. Everything you've said fits in with that."

"Are you telepathic? Can you read my mind?"

"Yes and no. It doesn't work that way. It's a primitive thing because we've never learned to use it. You transmit pictures and feelings. I know you, know your mood and to some extent what you're thinking. With training or study we believe concise communication is possible, but it's been suppressed so well for so long that so far I don't know anyone who can use it that way."

"If you can't read words what use is it, or how could it be a danger to the government?"

"They can read words, and it's always possible that you might, during dreams or something. They don't take that kind of chance. That's why all governments have gone along with this. You can't lie when telepath's are about. They instinctively know you're lying. Can you imagine a politician telling the truth."

He smiled. "I'm sure some do occasionally, or did."

"Yes, perhaps, but they only told the little bit of truth that served their purposes. Everything about government is secrecy. All decisions are made in back rooms, the motives for those decisions are not the ones put forward when those decisions are made public. A telepath would know the real motives. Most people did anyway, but accepted the official line because it was easier or they thought there was nothing they could do. That's how they controlled governments. Politicians are men and women seeking power, they aren't going to risk losing it by exposing what's going on. Those that might are kept in the dark."

"You're talking conspiracies, be careful you don't get taken away as paranoid"

"Man is a conspiratorial animal, it's commonly called social or pack behaviour. We've conspired against nature since we first evolved, and each other since we found one group wanted what another had. As long as man has been divided into groups, families, tribes, countries they've all conspired continuously against each other. In government conspiracy is the norm. That's how things are done.

"It's refreshing to find someone who would be considered more paranoid than me."

"The woman in Whitby said they could defend against the virus and trigger it in others at will. If that's true then paranoia would be difficult," replied Tanya.

"If they can control the virus to that extent then the obvious question is did they create it. I've always suspected AIDS was a created disease. I'm afraid as far as the government intelligence agencies are concerned I am paranoid

"I've been thinking about that ever since we got away from Whitby." said Tanya thoughtfully. "I can't see any possible reason for doing such a thing. It's decimated them as well. If they can control it they haven't done it very well."

"Maybe they only have limited supplies of vaccine or whatever they use. Maybe it just got out of the lab before they were ready." Replied Barry.

"If they did develop this disease, along with others, and released it among the population then nobody's paranoia comes anywhere near being strong enough. "

"Tanya you're convincing yourself of something that's to say the least unlikely." interrupted Sean. "We have no proof for any of this."

"True, but the more I see and learn the more convincing it's becoming. The only thing I can't understand is how people with enough malice to deny everyone far greater happiness could exist, and be in control."

"That's the only part I could understand." said Sean. "There are plenty about like that. I don't see how telepathy would make us happier though."

"Imagine a world without lies or deceit, without crime, where no small group could control the rest, so no wars. Any aspect of life you could imagine would be improved."

"I haven't noticed any great difference."

"We've only just found out it's available to us all, and in most it's still being blocked, those in Whitby. Even so you knew you could trust Alan the moment you met him, and the rest."

"I had no reason to distrust them. They were friendly. The only surprise I've had that makes me think a little is my meeting with you. I did feel I knew you, but that might be explained by other things, lust, loneliness, grief and hope. I haven't figured it out yet."

"What do you think's going on at Whitby then?"

"I think it's just the usual power mad control freaks trying to run every body's life. The German's didn't have a monopoly on people like that in the late thirties, and they're still around in every country, including this."

"You're not saying what you believe, and I don't know why."

Sean's face went as red as a beetroot. She was right, he did think something sinister was going on but couldn't understand what. Stating the obvious was meant to make him seem sure, impress her. His automatic defence response whenever she spoke to other men, who all seemed to him to be more in tune with Tanya.

He had no defence against her guessing his mind, or reading it. He couldn't lie to her because she did seem to know. He couldn't think of a response, but Barry came to his rescue.

"You're getting a little fired up Tanya."

"They need stopping, it's wrong what they're doing now and was wrong what they did before."

"You're preaching to the converted."

"Yes," she smiled shyly. "I'm sorry, but the thought of what they're doing to the people at Whitby has fired me up. I was a pacifist before we went there."

"Fanatics are never born, they're always the converted."

"That's probably true. They say there's 'a' difference between pathetic and apathetic. As far as I can see the words can be used interchangeably. Sean, you're still not convinced about telepathy are you?"

Sean smiled, "Despite what I said I really don't know. All this goes against everything I was taught or believed. Everybody seems to have known something was going on before the virus, but I took no notice. I'd heard the words mind control but virtually nothing else. I didn't think it affected me. Now to hear that somebody can stop the virus but haven't, and that those same people are involved in mind control is more than I can absorb. But I have no doubts about them needing to be stopped, Maybe not for the same reasons as Barry or you, but very good reasons of my own. As far as I'm concerned you're just trying the condemned with all these revelations and speculations."

"The more we understand about them the better." stated Tanya.

"I understood enough a long time before we went to Whitby. It's time we acted."

"What do you intend to do?" Asked Barry

"Fight them!" stated Sean, without hesitation.

"How exactly?"

"I don't know exactly, but a big club will beat telepathy, mind control or anything else. You should have seen what wolf did to one of these supermen. If he can I'm sure we can."

"They aren't supermen, far from it, but they have superior technology, and you can't ignore that. Don't underestimate their weapons." Warned Barry.

"You know something about those, how would you fight them?"

"As I am doing, cutting down power lines and lamps."

"Will that defeat them?"

"No," smiled Barry "But it's a safe way to fight. I'm also fighting in another way, by telling you all this. Information is a weapon against them. Their power is in secrecy, and people taking their orders, doing their dirty work for them. If everyone is informed about them not many would help them, and once they loose secrecy they're very limited in what they can do."

"I think the people in Whitby already know all about them."

"In that case all you can do is try to neutralise their weapons, as I've been trying to do."

"They have conventional weapons, and people trained to use them. How can we neutralise them."

"You can't, but if their supporters are ordinary people misled then you can educate them. Weapons are not a problem if there's no one to use them, or if their operators are on your side. I don't believe those in Whitby know everything, otherwise none would help them."

"Will you help us, join us?"

"You're asking a lot, and maybe causing yourself problems. I wasn't lying when I said they want me personally. I don't know why but they spent a great deal of effort in keeping control of me. When things finally broke down and I was free I chose to hide. As long as I hide they don't know I'm still alive, if they find out I am they may well think it worth while to try to get me."

"Why are you important to them?"

"I've told you I don't know."

"All right, what makes you think you're important to them?"

"It's a very long and unlikely story."

"We have no urgent appointments, and there's nothing on TV."

"All right, I'll start when I first became aware of the security services interest in me. I'd been living and working in America for about eight years when various things happened that made me think it was time to move on. I associated the misfortunes of the time with bad luck or bad judgement, and I'd always dreamed of building my own house, so I began looking round the country for somewhere to build.

I had plenty of money, so didn't rush. I just drove from state to state to find the ideal place. The roads in much of the states are quiet, but I began to notice there was always a car behind me. Some places I might only see one or two cars the whole day, plus the one always behind. I was a little surprised that anyone thought I was worth following, and a little flattered. It certainly didn't bother me, I didn't care, I'd nothing to hide.

I found my ideal place and over the next few years built my house. I

often found signs that someone had been in the house when I wasn't. Again this didn't bother me. They didn't steal anything or damage anything. I put it down to paranoia on the part of the security services and went on with my life.

Then I began to get nervous, for no reason I could imagine. I've never had any real personal fear. I could never imagine anyone wanting to harm me. I had no hatred of anybody, and would help anybody I could.

The nervousness got worse, and people started acting strangely, doing odd things, as though they hated me, but they were always pleasant to my face. This was psychological warfare and completely outside my knowledge or experience.

Then I started to get the impression that there was some secret military base nearby, and I was considered a spy or something. Some friends I had also acted strangely and eventually I found out they thought I was some kind of government assassin. I was totally confused by all this but decided that if I had chosen some sensitive area to build I should probably leave.

I was a nervous wreck when I finally did leave, and everyone assisted that by driving me down strange country lanes, or taking me on long diversions when they were taking me to the airport. When I got back here I had some kind of nervous breakdown, I had panic attacks triggered by certain words and actions. I basically went insane at times, and really believed the intelligence services were going to kill me."

"Was this the withdrawal you talked about."

"Yes, but I didn't know that at the time. It was withdrawal combined with hypnotic suggestions planted earlier and psychological warfare. The doctors I saw here were in on it, none of them giving me anything to alleviate the situation, until, after a year, I was diagnosed by a psychiatrist as clinically depressed, then I was given the substance I had been addicted to for years without knowing.

By this time I realised what was happening, but not why, it made no sense. Strange things happened at night in bed, vibration, ridiculous sweating, incredible pains etc. After some time I began to recognise certain features, and identified the agents in use, such as microwaves, drugs of various kinds and subliminal suggestion. Then I picked up odd bits of news from TV and papers about mind control programs etc. and it became ever clearer that I was a victim of one of these programs. It also became clear in hindsight that I had been virtually from birth, and that many others around me were also victims."

"From what little I've heard of these mind control programs they were stopped in the mid nineties," put in Sean.

"In America they may have been, but they weren't here. That is the reason I was driven out at that time. Anyway I started a diary that year, and also began to examine my past life for clues as to why me. The first thing I realised was that my writing is atrocious. I'd always known this, but it took on new significance.

When I was a child just starting at school a policy was started whereby left handed children were made to write right handed. This policy was later dropped, but in my case the damage had been done. I will never be

able to write well, it's always unnatural to me and I have never been able to learn to touch type, I have to think too much about the words.

Most attacks on me have been on the left side of my body. This side is now less developed than the right. My left leg is noticeably thinner than my right etc. There are many other things from my past unusual, but nothing to tell me why I'm important, only that I am."

"You think the left handed rule was made just for you?"

"I have reasons to suspect it's possible, but no, I think it was made for that whole generation, the left handed ones. It was only enforced for a few years, the years I was learning to write, and thousands of others."

"What reasons?"

"You'd have to read my diaries, it took years to come to any of these conclusions. I'm having to deduce things from the actions against me of others, who are in turn trying to confuse the issues. It took ten years of thinking about this to realise the connection between writing and government policy. I don't know what reasons were given at the time for making children right handed, but it should have been dropped instantly. It was almost immediately obvious what the effects were. As far as I can make out only those born in forty eight or nine would have been affected, and only those going to state schools who were left handed."

"That's still a lot of people."

"They may all be just as important as me to the security services. Until I know why they were interested on wasting time and money on me I can't even guess at who else is involved. Telepathy is something new to put in the equation, perhaps the answers lie there."

"The answers are all in Whitby, you won't find them hiding out here," remarked Tanya.

"That may well be true, but they could be very hard to get. The fact that you've captured two but got nothing from them isn't encouraging."

"Perhaps we didn't know the right questions. If we captured more I'm sure we'd get all the answers."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"I've told you we don't know. What would you suggest?"

"You say they have power in Whitby, knock it out would be a good start. Shut down the power station they're using, or cut the power lines. That should be do-able."

"Their power comes from a generator ship in the harbour."

"Sink it then, cut off the fuel. There must be a weakness, find it and use it. With electricity one can control thousands, without it they need numbers to control others. That they don't have. Once their power is gone use information against them. Take away their control and then you can destroy them."

"That sounds like a good objective. Will you help?"

"What would you want me to do?"

"Come with us back to the others. Help us organise and plan to take out their power. help us figure out exactly how to do it."

"How many of you are there?"

"Only a handful so far, but they know of others and will try to gather them together. You have to start somewhere, if you join us then it's a start."

"All right, I could do with the company anyway. Let me get some things together and I'll come with you."

Twenty people now constituted 'the group', living in a large mansion north of York. Twenty two had originally moved there, but two had gone off in the four days of residence. The disease wasn't finished yet, but the rate people succumbed had dropped drastically. One prisoner had also gone off, he probably wouldn't have survived anyway, the other currently resided in a small cottage some distance from the main house.

When Sean Tanya and Barry arrived, escorted by Liam who'd been on watch at the roadside house, they were greeted warmly by Alan and Cath. Alan felt that Barry's knowledge would be very useful, and he seemed a little less pessimistic of their chances than previously. Contact had been established with about two dozen more individuals, and it was hoped through these even more might eventually be recruited.

Tanya volunteered to unsaddle the horses, and Alan led the other two into the main hall to introduce them. Everyone else was already there, except Robin. A bewildering list of names flowed past, virtually none being absorbed, at least by Sean, who wasn't really comfortable in crowds. He was amazed however at how familiar most seemed, and all were very friendly. Alan still appeared to be the leader, and when he raised his arms for attention everyone turned to him.

"You're all here for one reason, to try to end what appears to be a bigger threat to us than the virus. We don't as yet know how we might be able to achieve that, but many if not most believe some kind of physical fighting will be involved. I myself suspect this to be the case, so I propose that we elect a military leader. Only one person here has tangled with these people with any success, and done so on several occasions. I propose Sean should lead us as far as fighting goes."

A stunned silence followed, from Sean. He soon spoke out when assenting voices made it plain he was being elected.

"Wait a minute! I'm not qualified to lead anything. I've had some incredible luck in getting out of situations anyone with any sense wouldn't have got into, but that's all it was, luck. I've fouled up anything I've tried to do since this thing started."

"If luck is all you have it's still more than anyone else," replied Alan. "Craig tried to ambush some of them, and with weapons and surprise he almost got himself and others killed and did no damage to the enemy. Others who have encountered them are in Whitby now, or dead. Speaking of Whitby you've been there and come back, and captured one of them in the bargain. That wasn't luck. A dog helped you once, but you'd been feeding him. That wasn't luck, it was foresight. Your fight at the old pit may have involved some luck, but it also involved imagination and courage. If we find someone more

qualified they can take charge, but I think we'd be very lucky to find someone."

Sean's face was on fire. He'd have been flattered except he remembered his quest for his children and how badly he'd performed. How he'd let his father down and worst of all his wife. He didn't want to be responsible for letting anyone else down.

Tanya put her arms round one of his, drawing his attention.

"I trusted you Sean, felt safe going into Whitby with you, and you didn't let me down. You brought me out completely unscathed even when it seemed things had gone badly wrong, twice. The luck involved was all bad, you managed despite that. With good luck we wouldn't have been stopped at all, you wouldn't have been attacked by a drunken soldier and you'd have found your children the first day."

Alan picked up on Tanya's theme, realising she'd sensed the problem. "Sean you can't let us down because we don't expect anything from you. Our chances of success against these people seem almost none existent but we feel you'd have a slightly better chance than anyone else here, slim though that may be."

Craig came over to them and stood directly in front of Sean. "I've fought them, and proved to myself at least that I haven't a chance. I really believe you would have done better in the same situation. I'm not saying you'd have won or anything, simply done better. That's all we can ask."

Sean stood in silence some time. The persuasion completely overwhelmed him. It made him feel they were expecting miracles from him but he also couldn't refuse. He had to accept the fact that he was going to let everybody down disastrously and he'd have to live with that, or not, as none would survive.

"All right, this isn't much of an army to go against the thousands in Whitby," he said sternly, hiding his embarrassment by becoming as businesslike as possible. "We have some weapons but aren't really trained to use them, and in a conventional conflict I think we'd be massacred. They're also the masters of unconventional war, so we don't have much chance there either. Barry has been fighting them for many years, but had little or no success, but he was alone. We should hear what he has to say."

Barry moved to the front, looking very unsure of himself. He'd been alone for months and wasn't at all comfortable with such a crowd.

"The main weapons they use are all radiation weapons, many in conjunction with drugs and or psychological warfare. Mostly in the microwave frequencies or the ultra low frequencies. All radiation weapons need electricity. Battery weapons are very limited. Denying them electricity would be the single biggest blow you could make against them."

"How much would that hurt them? Would it defeat them, or weaken them enough so we could?" asked one of the newcomers.

"I wouldn't think so. There are hundreds of them at least, and they have conventional weapons. But, once their power is gone it means you're just fighting men and women like us. To fight them you need an army, and one

exists in Whitby. If you can get control of the army or a sizeable portion of it you have a chance."

"How do we get control of their army, or stop their power?" he asked, not sounding very impressed.

Sean answered. "Obviously to stop their power we have to destroy the ship. To get control of the army we have to convince them that what they're doing is wrong. We need ideas on both points. I don't know how to do either, but between us we should be able to work something out."

"We could sink the ship," put in Craig enthusiastically. "We can make explosive from weed killer. Perhaps put it in jerry cans and float it down the river to the ship, then set it off."

"Sounds reasonable," said Sean, very relieved that someone had come up with a practical solution to at least one problem. "If you know how to make explosives maybe you should be responsible for that side of the plan."

To Sean's great relief he just nodded assent. Treating Craig as subservient was a big risk, but he'd got away with it, and also increased his respect for him. No matter how much he'd like to dislike Craig he couldn't, but Tanya was worth fighting even a friend for. As he'd assumed the mantle of command he continued.

"What about convincing those helping them, any ideas on that?"

"We could open up a radio transmitter and transmit to them, before we blow up the ship." A man in his middle years had made the suggestion, one Sean didn't know.

"How do we get them to listen to their radios?" Sean asked, not being particularly impressed by this idea for some reason he couldn't name.

"Print out leaflets, wait till the wind is right and send loads of balloons over with them attached. Put simple rope fuses on the balloons to bring them down on the town." The young boy Liam came up with this solution, and to Sean it made sense.

"The balloons sounds like a good idea but the transmitter could be jammed." That was his problem, jamming. He didn't know anything about radio really, but he'd often heard about jamming radio on films.

"Balloons might not be such a good idea anyway. They have patrols out at least as far as Malton We'd have to launch them from at least that distance. Hitting Whitby would probably be impossible." That was Cath, and like Alan she commanded a lot of respect. What she said was so obvious that Sean felt like kicking himself for thinking the idea practical.

"Someone will have to go in, Sean and Tanya did." Lean hadn't really spoken to Sean and Tanya much. Hearing the doctor using their names seemed a little strange.

"You might still get in there easily enough, they welcome people, but I don't think you'd leave so easily," replied Tanya. "We took them by surprise, That won't happen again."

"Whoever went would come out with all the rest, when it was over," responded Lean.

"In that case our plan is made," interrupted Sean. "Now all we have to

do is decide on the details. Craig work out what you need, what help you want. For everybody else discuss the problems among yourselves, try to come up with workable solutions. It's getting late now so we'll have another meeting tomorrow."

The meeting broke up and people separated into small groups. One group gathered round Craig, eager to play with explosives. The other groups all discussed the problems, no one keen to volunteer to go in to Whitby. A small group gathered around Alan, some of those from the roadside house. Tanya, Sean and Barry joined them.

"It's good to have someone who seems to know what he's talking about with us," said Alan, holding out his hand to Barry.

"I'm not sure I know what I'm talking about, and I'm afraid I can't be much practical help. I can't go near Whitby, or anywhere where they might be. I'm loaded with tricks that they can trigger from quite a distance if they see me."

"Tricks?" Alan asked, very puzzled, as was everyone else.

"They damage you with masers or sound wave beams, usually during sleep, or even arrange accidents. Then they introduce through diet or even aerosol radio sensitive material to the healing cells. When this material is exposed to radio frequencies for which it's designed it reacts in some way, usually converting the radio waves to electricity or heat, causing damage or pain. Over the years they've loaded every joint and some internal organs. They can cause me pain in any joint, inflame the tooth apses they created or stomach ulcer, and probably numerous other nasty effects I don't know about, just with radio waves that wouldn't affect anyone else."

"Why?" stammered Alan, stunned.

"Control. They call it mind control, but it's not, it's simple control through drugs, pain, fear or blackmail, in fact anything that works. The nearest it comes to mind control is subliminal suggestion, sometimes combined with hypnotic drugs to make it more effective."

"The woman in Whitby said they read thoughts," interrupted Tanya. "Do you know anything about that?"

"I might be wrong about this because I know nothing about telepathy, I had assumed they used machines. They lower your body temperature a degree or so, slowing down your mind so you think at the speed you would talk. They can read thoughts then. I believed they received the brainwaves as they would any radio waves, but at low frequency. The brain transmits at about seven cycles I believe. If telepathy works then maybe they have people trained to read thoughts."

"My God what are we fighting?" asked Alan. "How can they get away with doing things like this. Why didn't you go to the police, or tell the newspapers."

"Proof, I don't have any. When they damage you with masers it leaves no evidence. The microwaves pass through the skin with little effect. The waves are only fully absorbed when they hit bone. They heat the bone and the flesh in contact is burned. There is no visible burn on the surface. Besides

most of the doctors I've dealt with in recent years have been a party to this. If I ask for a blood test it's delayed by days to give time to clear any drugs from my system. They probably have people in the labs anyway."

"How many people are like you?"

"At least thousands, possibly millions, at least there were. It's quite likely that one or more people here is tagged with magnetic markers to enable their computers to direct beams at any part of the body. They have beams constantly on the back of peoples neck and head, computers tracking them. What this is to achieve apart from pain I don't know, and most of the time it doesn't cause pain."

"This all sounds too ridiculous."

"That's intentional. If I went to the police with a story like this what would they say, even if they weren't involved, and some are, perhaps many. They made sure when they caused me a breakdown with withdrawal symptoms that the police and as many people as possible were involved. I go with this story and they just say he's crazy, already gone insane once, everybody knows that. They can get away with doing almost anything they want so long as it's not obvious, and nobody would believe me.

I kept a diary for years, sometimes a whole page is taken up with one days attacks. That was also intentional, make it as ridiculous as possible. They've been doing this a long time, and have an army of psychiatrists etc. working for them, plus many just helping them. The Nazis in Germany before the war used the same kind of people to further their aims."

"Craig believes they created the virus, and aids."

"I can't say, but they do use diseases, and I suspect some very nasty ones. It wouldn't surprise me at all if they had made it. I'm quite certain that they spread the stomach bacteria through the population after the last war through infecting soldiers. It's known to cause heart disease, stomach cancer and numerous other things, but no link has ever been proven, so it's still not illegal to infect anyone."

"We know they've blocked any proof of telepathy, so it seems likely they've also blocked proof of other things. We thought only telepathy was involved."

"Maybe that's what the microwaves on the back of the head do."

"Your wrong about it being legal Barry. Any attack on someone causing pain or injury is assault. They're just common thugs with better technology."

"They've been very careful in the laws they pass. You might find there's no such thing as assault under British law any more If someone's attacked it's called affray, and you'd have to look very carefully at the definition in law."

"I really don't think any laws matter much any more What are these magnetic markers?"

"Same as the tricks, but they introduce magnetic material into the healing cells in different points of the body. Sensors can see the markers so the computer has a good map of the body in any position and can aim it's weapons

accurately regardless of light or clothing. Most useful for people in bed."

"Is there anything else they do?"

"The list is endless, we could be here all night. It's probably best to worry about getting rid of them rather than lamenting what they did in the past."

"That would be all right except they're still doing it, to the people in Whitby. Didn't you have friends to help."

"They make sure you don't make friends. Firstly they choose suitable people to act against you, playing little childish tricks, like putting a freezing chemical on your gloves. This means you don't know who to trust. Your sense of smell is blocked, combined with the stomach bacteria which causes body odour you can't detect it's an effective repellent. Then they tell everyone you normally come in contact with not to approach you, but to be friendly if you approach them. That effectively isolates you, because the reasons given for doing this are whatever is most effective for that person. If they're a little paranoid then they'd be told you were some kind of government assassin. This actually happened when I was in America. To others it's been suggested that I might be related to Christ, or Nostradamus. Whatever will prevent people becoming friendly."

"And you really have no idea why?"

"I have many ideas but I don't know. One of the main things that's been constant throughout is being prevented from relaxing. They go to a great deal of trouble over this, and I may escape their microwaves or manage to counter something they do but not relaxation. They'll apparently do anything required to prevent that, plus many of the other things they do also prevent relaxation as a side effect. Overall my impression is that this is one of if not the main aim of the whole thing."

"Relaxation and telepathy are closely linked. Telepathy only really works when you're relaxed, well that's not quite accurate but in general. It's also far more effective with people you're close to."

"As far as I know I can't read peoples minds, nor communicate without a phone."

"I'm quite sure that's what it's about though. Perhaps you came close to learning how to do it, or you actually did consciously send or receive something without knowing."

"As I said I'm not aware of any abilities in that regard"

"All right, but think about it. If you know something, anything about telepathy, it could be invaluable to us, because we don't know much about it either. It's been extremely well suppressed"

Sean suddenly noticed the room was almost silent as soon as Alan finished speaking. He turned away from the group to look at all the others, all were staring at one woman, who was staring at nothing. A shiver went down Sean's back. He'd almost forgotten about the virus, become complacent, but this brought it back with a vengeance. He glanced at his watch automatically, it was exactly seven o'clock.

Others in the same group as the victim recovered from their shock

quickly, and took the woman out of the room as soon as they were absolutely certain she was gone. The last turned just before leaving. "We've been expecting this for some hours, but kept her with us just in case it didn't happen. We'll take care of her." He turned and disappeared through the door.

Sean stared at the doorway for some time, he was shaking. He turned helplessly to Tanya and found that she was even more shocked. Nothing could dull the impact of someone going off, not seeing it many times and certainly not time itself.

"This is totally unbelievable!" raged Alan. "We're fighting other people when we should all be fighting that."

"The people in Whitby, those in charge, they're acting as though the virus is over, but it's still affecting us. Do you think they're protected in some way?"

"What do you mean acting as if it's over?"

"Controlling people, herding them together. If you were likely to die any time what's the point. Power is no good if you're not likely to live to enjoy it."

"We can't even guess at what they're up to, we need some information. Robin is with your prisoner Sean. Robin was wounded when they tried to ambush the soldiers, he never really recovered and now he's got it, can't be away from a clock. The man wouldn't tell us anything but Robin said he could make him talk."

"You still have a prisoner? Controller?" asked Barry, hardly daring to believe it.

"Yes, we had two. Sean captured them. Both had tried to kill him and Tanya, but one's dead."

"Leave me alone with him for a few hours and I'm sure he'll tell you all you want to know. They've caused misery and death to millions over decades, me included. I've no qualms at all about using what I know, including a lot from them."

"How would you make him talk?" asked Alan, suspecting more than words would be used for persuasion.

"Do you really want to know more?" asked Barry.

Alan thought about it for a moment, then decided that it was important enough, perhaps a matter of survival for them all. "No, I don't. Ask Craig over there to show you where they are. He'll probably help you as well."

Sean watched Barry leave with Craig. He had no feelings at all for the prisoner. He couldn't hurt him himself, and a few months ago would have been outraged by what was going to be done, but things had changed. These people were not fit to be among human beings. They were worse than anything that had gone before. They made the Nazis look like pranksters. And if they had something that made them immune he would quite happily throttle the life out of any of them.

The woman going off and revelations from Barry on top of a long trip were all taking their toll on Sean. He was exhausted and emotionally drained. He looked hopefully at Tanya, and was pleasantly surprised when she smiled

and came to him.

"Do we have a room Alan?" she asked, putting her arm through Sean's.

"Yes, of course. Some have been claimed, but there are lots spare. If the door doesn't have someone's name on it it's free. Put a tag or something on the door so people don't just come strolling in."

Tanya led Sean towards the main stairs. "This all looks so hopeless. I can't see any future at all for any of us. If the virus doesn't get us those insane people in Whitby will. There are so many of them and they have every advantage."

"They have one weakness, a fatal one. They must control others, and to do that they can't kill them all. They have to use restraint or they'll have no one to control. We don't."

"Do you think they have some defence against the virus?"

"Yes. When you think about it they have to. Their numbers are out of all proportion to their pre virus position. As the ones in control by definition they must have been a small minority. Now they're not. The virus hasn't afflicted them as it has the rest of us."

"Maybe Barry will find out something. I didn't get any sense of cruelty in him, but I don't think that will affect what he does. He's the kind of person that once he decides something nothing will deflect him. I think he decided his actions a long time ago if he ever got the chance."

"Normally I'd say you were doing a lot of guessing, but I've formed the same opinion of him. For tonight though I'd like to forget all this, return to the night we first met."

"I'd like that too," she smiled as they moved down the corridors towards an empty room.

"Oh shit!" snapped Sean. "I forgot to put food out for wolf, just in case he turns up."

"It's all right, I put some out at the end of the lane after I'd finished with the horses. He came to within twenty feet and sat and watched me. There were a couple of other dogs with him, but they stayed behind him. I left plenty for all of them."

"Did you try to call him."

"He wouldn't have come, but he probably will eventually, if you want him to."

"I'm not sure I do, and I certainly didn't want him to before he saved us. The last thing I need at the moment is a pet. I like him just as he is, a distant but useful friend."

Tanya opened the room door and went in. Large well furnished bedrooms spoke of wealth, but money hadn't saved them, unless they were in Whitby. Unfortunately the servants were also gone and there were no bedclothes on the bed. They found plenty in one of the cupboards and in the rapidly fading light made the bed and quickly occupied it.

chap 10

sep28/29

The disturbance was gradually getting stronger, and had been continuous now for two days. Any time he could manage to relax for a minute Chantry could feel it. It didn't seem to be getting nearer though, just stronger. People were being infected, becoming a closely tuned group. His worst nightmare had happened.

He lay in bed in his cabin, trying to tune to it but his own defences stopped him. Was this part of the secret elites plan or something separate. If it was something separate it was a threat to him as well. No, it had to be part of it. A group of rogues, coming here under the protection of the other the same as the couple did a few days ago.

He was ready for them. He'd placed men in the two bank buildings just across the road. He'd stay on the bridge as much as possible. There were guns up there and he had armed guards on board all day. There was even one there all night. The only real danger he could see was during the day when people were about on the street. Mixing in with them like last time and then taking a pot shot at him when he went on deck. Then taking the ship, and all its technology.

It wouldn't work. He'd set codes in the computers that couldn't be broken. They might take the ship but wouldn't be able to control anything. The defensive transmissions would stop within twenty four hours when he didn't renew the command, and everyone here in town would become victims of the virus.

His cabin had it's own transmitter, and a door like a bank vault. If worst came to worst he'd lock himself in until the virus did it's work then after ten days go up and press the self destruct, shutting down the satellite. The other elite couldn't have protection. Apart from the ships transmitter there was no protection, and anyone who'd been in the field any length of time became totally susceptible. The personal units were only good for about seven or eight days before you had to return to the main field for a few days.

When he was sure it was safe he'd seal the ship and go join what survivors there were outside. Start from scratch. Find a way to regain control. Rebuild society with himself as the sole control of the world eventually

Chantry got out of bed and walked up to the bridge. He couldn't sleep, couldn't relax even with all his preparations. Nothing could be certain when you didn't know what you were fighting. He left the lights off, and looked out the window towards the town. He could see his guard standing near the gangway, and one more person. It was Moran, coming towards the ship.

Moran's approach didn't make him feel at all uneasy. Of all of them he was the only one Chantry trusted, He hated him, but could read him like a book. He wasn't bright enough to be any danger, nor physically strong enough. Chantry trusted him because he knew exactly what he'd do in any situation, look after himself. He didn't have the imagination or guts to mount some kind of coup, assuming he could find anybody to help him which was very unlikely. Everyone hated him.

Moran made his way to the bridge and Chantry met him in the doorway, to prevent him turning on the lights.

"What brings you down here at this hour?" asked Chantry of the slightly startled Moran in the doorway, his hand still reaching for the handle which wasn't there.

"You gave me real fright just then, opening the door like that. I thought you'd be asleep, with all the lights off."

"No, just getting some air." replied Chantry, still blocking access through the door and obviously waiting for an explanation of Moran's' presence.

"I couldn't sleep, just walking round and thought I'd come up here and sit for a while. Its a good view of the town from here."

Moran was lying, Chantry could see that with normal senses, he didn't need to read his thoughts. Moran was scared, all the defensive preparations were worrying him. He knew things were happening that he didn't understand and that worried him because he didn't trust Chantry. That amused Chantry. No one trusted Moran.

"Yes it is a good view," he said casually moving away from the door allowing Moran onto the ships bridge.

"I was talking to one of the children today, young Rob, he said there was a problem with the defensive transmitter, and you were having to re-set it every day, is that true?"

The boy Rob had performed better than Chantry could have hoped, and much quicker. Chantry had only told the boy that morning. He knew Rob would tell one of the tribunes sooner or later, but telling Moran almost immediately was an unexpected bonus. The boy was taunting Moran, showing his power, showing he knew more. Rob would make a good elite, for a short time anyway.

"Its a minor problem I should be able to fix in a few days, nothing to worry about."

"It just seems that perhaps you should have told us. It was a bit of a

shock receiving such information from a child." Moran knew what it meant, knew that Chantry had arranged things so that if anything happened to him all would be lost. The others would also know by now, let the secret elite digest that.

"I did mean to mention it but it just never came up, as I said its a minor problem easily fixed. I only told the boy because he asked when he came on to the bridge as I was doing it. You know how curious children are."

"Are you sure it's wise having these children running round the ship all the time. There's a lot of sensitive equipment here."

"The four here are very well behaved, and I'm teaching them about some of the equipment so they can help out. The two days they've been here I've found them very useful." Let Moran understand that the children were trusted, he and the other tribunes weren't. Make sure they know their position, keep them on their toes.

"Well you know them best I suppose. I should probably get back and try to get some sleep, it could be a long day tomorrow."

Chantry's heart skipped a few beats. What was special about tomorrow. "What's happening tomorrow?" He asked as calmly as he could manage. He forced all his concentration on to Moran, trying to detect his thoughts, his mood. Was it possible Moran was the one?

"Organising the accommodation for all the people we're bringing over from the south side, had you forgot?"

"Oh, that, of course, it had slipped my mind. Yes it could be a long day. A lot of people to move about, get into their new homes." Chantry could detect no deceit, no excitement in Moran. He wasn't the one. Just a nasty malicious individual pretending to care about others.

"Most of the orphans we could place with families have already been moved, tomorrow the majority of the orphan families are set for relocation. The newly powered houses are ready. That should only leave a handful to worry about. Well I better go, see you in the morning."

As he left Chantry completely dismissed him from his mind. He turned his thoughts back to the disturbance in the higher levels.

"Who are you, what are you up to?" Questions he couldn't answer, or even ask aloud. There would be a mistake, something to give him a clue, of that he was certain. He just needed time, time was his ally, and the enemy of everyone else.

Rob had watched Chantry leave his cabin and head for the bridge. He hadn't locked the door, which was not unusual. There were only the children on the ship and they were asleep as far as Chantry was concerned. Rob didn't sleep much, he explored the ship at night, nosing into every nook and cranny. Chantry had separated him from Susan, prevented him looking after her. To protect them both Rob went along with it, but now he knew what was going on. Chantry had as good as told them he controlled the virus that had killed his mother. He knew she was dead, and had thought his father dead too until he'd sensed him, here, nearby, a few days ago, the day they brought him here. Of

course he couldn't be certain, but then he'd heard of the intruders, seen the picture of his father, in the town near the ship.

Chantry had explained to them how these were rogues that could not be controlled, and had to be destroyed. They were a danger to Chantry and the children who would be his partners when they were trained. He'd explained how they were superior, better than the rest, the only ones fit to govern the peasants. He would adopt them as his own children, give them the abilities to take their rightful place in the world. Share all the technology he had available on this ship, with a few exceptions of course.

Rob took him at his word, and in his wanderings had collected a small amount of that technology. He would put that technology and his own knowledge to work tonight. From various films he'd seen he knew what to do, had tested various things, and now moved towards Chantry's cabin carrying a small bag of parts. When his father came again he'd make sure Chantry couldn't harm him.

Rob soon found out why Chantry wasn't too careful about locking his cabin, no cupboards or drawers would open. All the panels with controls were dead. There was nothing else in the room except a bed and one stool. Rob had some plastic explosive and a detonator, a small battery, a few feet of wire and some sticky tape. He'd intended to rig some kind of switch, putting the explosive in a cupboard or drawer and make it so the wires would touch when it was opened, but he couldn't. He dropped on his knees and looked under the control panels, he could hide the plastic under there but there was no way of triggering the detonator.

Almost in panic he scanned the room again, and a glint of silver caught his eye, under the bed. It was a laptop computer, but a very thick one, more like a small suitcase. He quickly dragged it out and it opened. The keypad seemed standard. He fumbled around the sides eventually finding the catches that allowed the keypad to be lifted revealing the workings. Two large batteries took up much of the space, the rest taken up with drives and electronics. It was far more complicated than his fathers, and had even less spare room inside despite being two or three times as thick. He tried to pull various pieces out but nothing would move, until he tried one of the batteries. It came out easily, leaving a one and a half inch wide and deep trough four inches long. He quickly packed his plastic in the trough and pushed in the detonator, then he was lost.

How could he rig it to go off. He could see no way of setting the wires up so they would touch when the case was opened, he couldn't even fit his small battery in. He needed to study this carefully, find a way to make it work, but then he heard footsteps coming down the internal stairs, Chantry was coming back. He hurriedly coiled up the wires from the detonator and put the keypad back on them then closed the lid and shoved it back under the bed. He raced for the door stuck his head round, Chantry had just finished the first stairs from the bridge to deck level, Rob had plenty of time to slip away.

His foot had only just got through the door when he stopped dead, the battery, he'd left the battery he'd taken out. He spun round, ran to the bed,

kicked the battery under the bed then raced back out of the door, leaving it ajar. The corridor outside Chantry's' cabin was twenty feet long, the stairs up to the deck at one end and ten feet the other side of his door a bend to the other cabins. Rob was still in the corridor as Chantry came into view on the stairs, but didn't see Rob flash round the bend, he was still distracted with his thoughts.

As Chantry approached his cabin he noticed the door slightly open, his heart almost stopped. He had no weapon, no defence if someone were waiting for him. He quickly but quietly turned and rushed back to the stairs, climbed to deck level and stuck his head out of the door. He hurriedly signalled to the sentry to get up there. He took the startled sentry down the stairs and told him to watch the cabin, shoot anyone who tried to leave. Then he rushed back up both flights of stairs to the bridge and armed himself with an automatic pistol.

His hands were shaking as he rejoined the sentry at the foot of the stairs. Was this it, the showdown. Had he forced the other elites hand with his precautions, rigging the transmitter. How had he got on board? Did he climb over the side from the river while Chantry was distracted by Moran, or simply follow Moran.

"Did any apart from tribune Moran come aboard?" he asked the sentry. He knew all the tribunes and wouldn't question their coming aboard, as he hadn't questioned Moran.

"No one." asserted the sentry.

"All right, go down to the door and push it open, stay well back but keep your rifle ready. If you see anyone in there shoot them."

The sentry slowly moved to the door, shoved it with the muzzle of his rifle. The door swung wide open revealing an empty cabin. He moved inside to check the near wall and behind the door.

"It's empty sir." he announced, re-emerging. "No one here."

"All right, carry on down the corridor, check the other cabins."

The sentry did as requested, returning a few minutes later with all four very sleepy and surprised children in tow.

"Only the children, I woke them so I figured I should bring them out. Maybe one of them opened your door."

"All right, thank you. Leave them here and search the rest of the ship. If you find nothing go back to your post."

Chantry had a good look around his cabin, then sat on the bed and beckoned the children in.

"Have any of you been to my cabin tonight?"

All replied they were asleep, but Alice, the youngest asked what was going on. She was the most intelligent, and the one he would expect to be behind any trouble, but he could detect no guilt in her. Now self doubt began to creep into Chantry's' mind. Was this distraction with the disturbance making him careless? Did he just forget to close the door properly. It was very possible, he had done a few other thoughtless things recently. He had to pull himself together, he couldn't afford to make even the simplest mistake.

"It's all right, it's nothing. Go back to bed."

As they left Chantry suddenly remembered his mobile unit. He quickly reached under the bed and was gratified when he felt the case. He pulled it out and opened it, still in tact. He closed the lid and pushed it back. He closed the cabin door and locked it then lay on the bed. He had to calm himself, get his mind organised better, start thinking more clearly. The cabin would be locked from now on, that took a little time and effort but it meant he'd never leave it open, would be certain he'd closed it. No more idleness, do everything right regardless of the extra effort.

He trusted the children, to a point. Alice was the one he watched closely, she was very intelligent, and ambitious despite her youth. If she thought she could de-throne Chantry she would. Rob was the least ambitious, he worried more about his sister than anything else. Chantry could use that as a lever, already was. As long as Chantry had control of his sister he trusted Rob completely. He'd put Rob in charge when he got them trained a little more, he'd keep Alice in check.

The four of them were impressing Chantry. It just might be possible to train them enough to sail the ship in a few weeks. Rob was already learning about electricity, soon he'd know enough to be able to make minor repairs, under instruction of course. Alice already seemed to understand the engines almost as well as he did himself. The other two could follow even quite complex instructions, and carried them out dutifully without needing supervision.

All he needed was a little more time, a few weeks. He reached over his head and touched the hidden sensor which slid up the wall hatch near his waist allowing the control panel to swing out. Then his ceiling monitor hatch slid away. Laid in bed watching the monitor he began checking his various spying devices one after another. First the town, then the ship. Rob was still awake, playing with his bits of wire, batteries and bulbs, the other three were trying to get to sleep. He flicked the switch that locked all four doors, just in case. Moran was right about that at least, it wasn't safe having them wondering about. One of them might have seen the open door and come in his cabin. Just by chance there was nothing in here, but he often had chemicals or tools of his trade in here.

He switched off the monitor and restored the panel. Tomorrow most of the people on the south side would be brought over, the day after the rest, then the road bridge could be raised permanently. After that he'd work on the fuel lines, within a week the way would be clear for the ship to sail at a moments notice. In a few weeks he'd even feel comfortable doing it, with his new crew.

chapter 11.

Sean woke early, but was reluctant to get out of bed because he knew it annoyed Tanya. He didn't have to wake her though, because she also stirred a few minutes after him.

"What woke me?" she groaned, not at all a morning person.

"I don't know, but it woke me as well. Do you want to get up?"

"No, I want..."

The door burst open and Craig rushed in, red faced and panting from some effort. He acted like an excited child, fidgeting and speaking quickly.

"We've done it, made explosive. It's incredible, it works."

This was a very revealing statement. Craig had spoken as though he was familiar with making explosives from weed killer, but his statement implied he didn't even know if it would work. The actual news that it did didn't make Sean feel at all easy. If they had explosives they would attack the ship. Once that was done there would be no going back, they would be at war with those in Whitby, and all that implied.

"Couldn't this wait till we got up!" snapped Tanya, seeing nothing in the information, merely a rude interruption to her morning misery.

"I figured you'd be up anyway, only the dead could have slept through the explosion we just made," replied Craig enthusiastically, completely ignoring her animosity. "Come on Sean we have to make plans to sink the ship. We need to get everyone together to help us make enough explosive and get it to Whitby."

"Today?" asked Sean incredulously.

"Sean a woman died yesterday. Who knows how many might die today. We don't have the luxury of time to think about this. We have to go while we can. Alan put you in charge, and the others have accepted that. No one wants to commit to anything, they're all scared. We need leadership, and that's one thing I can't do. The others won't follow me."

"I'm scared Craig. Once we start this there's no going back."

"Back to what? They're all gone, billions of them. We probably won't be long in following them. But while I'm alive I'll do anything I can to insure

they don't inherit the Earth."

"All we may end up doing is annoying them."

"Even that's better than nothing, but I don't believe that. I believe we can hurt them, badly. If we take out that ship we take away most of their power. They won't be coming chasing us, they'll have to take physical control of those in town. I don't believe they can."

"Craig, Alan put me in charge but I'm no leader, nor am I a soldier of any kind. Pick someone else, I'll support them."

"You are the only one to have successfully fought them. I lead a disaster, setting a trap we were lucky to escape from. You have gone into their traps and not only escaped but taken prisoners, twice. Who else is better qualified. I believe you are a leader and a soldier without knowing it. I'll follow you, as will the rest. Don't underestimate yourself. I'm scared as well, but I know you'd make the best decisions in any situation. If we fail then so be it, but we'd have given it the best shot."

"What if I say wait till we get more information?"

"I'll argue for all I'm worth to go now, but I will abide by whatever decision you make, including to wait."

"Give me a while to get up," said Sean with a sigh. He really didn't want any part of this. His natural instincts, like most was to just wait and hope it went away. He was intelligent enough to realise that something had to be done, he just couldn't understand how he'd ended up the one having to do it, or at least lead the effort. "We'll come down in a short time, when we wake up properly."

As Craig left and closed the door Tanya raised herself on her elbows.

"He can be the most annoying person imaginable. He's like a puppy with it's first bone."

"Yes," replied Sean, pleased. "I can't somehow dislike him though."

"I'm not surprised after that bit of greasing."

"Well, that bucket of cold water was bracing this time in the morning."

"Oh go away. I need some more sleep." She turned over and flopped down, burying her head in the pillow.

Sean was used to her in the morning, so got up carefully and dressed. He went down to find Craig had gathered most of the others in the large room. Sean didn't at all feel like a leader, and if the silence that accompanied his entrance was in expectation of some revelations from him they were in for a shock. He hadn't a clue what to do or say.

"Craig, you've made some explosive, how long will it take and what do you need to make enough to sink that ship?"

"I need about ten people to collect and carry the things we need. I could have enough to fill ten jerry cans by this afternoon. That should do more than sink it."

"Have you figured out how to get it on the ship?"

"We get it to a little town just upstream, float it down the river and set it off against the hull. In the dark tonight it should be easy."

To say it sounded easy was an understatement. Sean could see so many flaws he didn't know where to start, but he also realised that they didn't have the information or expertise to plan anything more elaborate. It would probably be best just to set off and solve any problems on the way. The chances of success were probably zero anyway.

"All right. We take out their power, what happens inside Whitby?"

"Panic among the controllers!" stated Craig. "They'll have to get every soldier they have on the streets to stop people escaping. Pull in all their patrols. We could all walk in, talk to the soldiers and people trapped there, get as many as possible to leave."

"From what we've seen of where and how people are kept there your ideas have some merit. They only guard a few streets, and without lights the place could leak like a sieve," said Sean thoughtfully.

"You must do more than that," interrupted Barry, walking towards Sean. He held two objects in his hands that resembled large mobile phones.

"They have protected Whitby from the virus, and protect themselves outside with these." He held the objects aloft so all could see them.

"How do those protect them?" asked Alan.

"I don't know, and neither did our captive, but he claims no one goes off in town and none of their men outside have gone off. He doesn't know, but some in Whitby know what the virus is and how to stop it. We have to get that information."

"How?" Sean asked, shocked at the sudden complication of what seemed a reasonably simple if doomed plan.

"We have to go in and try to take control, find their headquarters and take it. Blowing up the ship isn't enough, they have battery powered machines. Not as powerful, but still maybe enough to retain control."

"Do you have any ideas on exactly how twenty of us can take the whole town, against armed trained soldiers."

"Most of the soldiers are not trained. They've just put people in uniform, those they could fool into helping them. It's a very unreliable army. Most don't even know how to fire the weapons they have."

"This information came from our prisoner I suppose?" asked Sean sceptically

"I'm absolutely certain it's good information. It was given under circumstances that virtually exclude lying. Robin gained all this, not me."

A flash of inspiration came to Sean, something he wasn't used to. Barry's remarks had set a remarkable train of thought in motion. He spoke while still thinking, to avoid the chance of losing it.

"What if we all dressed in uniforms, and went among them. So long as the power is out they can't read every body's thoughts. We could do all kinds of damage, and maybe find out who they are and get some with the information we need."

"Brilliant Idea!" shouted Craig. "They wouldn't stop us moving around if any patrols spotted us. We shouldn't have any trouble getting the explosives to the town near Whitby. I'd been worried about that."

"So far we have a plan. Firstly get the explosives to the river, where Craig and whoever is helping him will float the explosives to the ship. The rest of us will wait in that little town till the ship goes, then walk into Whitby and see what we can find out. It's then up to each person to do what they think best. That's the best plan we can make given what we know. Any ideas to improve on that?"

"The ship is the power," added Barry. "So the headquarters won't be far away. We should all collect in that general area. If we find the headquarters we should all try to take it and anybody inside. Hold them as hostages. Then we'd have hope for help from those there."

"We could take leaflets with us," put in Cath. "Telling them the situation and asking for help. Pass them round as soon as we get there."

"This is beginning to sound a little less hopeless," said Sean, pleased that so many good suggestions were coming. It really was beginning to shape up into a real plan of action. "We'll have to divide up into small groups. First Craig needs ten people to help make his gunpowder."

Ten were quickly selected, and immediately set off with him to collect the weed killer and other material. Two more immediately left to get uniforms, and possibly more weapons and ammunition. Others set about getting computers and printers hooked up to generators to print their leaflets. Tanya came sheepishly into an almost deserted room.

"I'm sorry I was such a cow Sean. I just don't wake up well, never have."

"Don't worry about it. We've decided what to do and we're getting ready. It starts tonight, and strangely enough I don't feel scared now."

"I do! What are we going to do?"

"A full scale attack on Whitby."

"You're joking, I hope."

"Not really. Come on and sit down, I'll explain the plan."

Sean told Tanya in as much detail as there was their intended actions, and also gave her the information supplied by Barry. Much to his surprise she didn't argue, merely listened in silence then asked what he wanted her to do.

"There are only Alan and Cath setting up a computer to print leaflets. Let's go and help them with the wording etc."

As they walked into the room Alan and Cath were using, a small generator burst into life outside the window. Alan's head popped above the frame. "Try it Cath, see if we have power."

"Computer and printer both up. Come on in."

"Need any help Cath?" asked Sean from the door.

"Of course, come in, both of you. Pull up some chairs, I might need help with this once it boots up. I'm not exactly an expert on computers."

"You never know, you might be the best in the world."

"Even in these times I doubt that, but I'm too old to go humping bags of sugar about, or uniforms, and too slow to join the others rounding up horses."

"Are you going into Whitby?" asked Tanya.

"Oh yes. Wouldn't miss it for the world, which when you think about it, it almost is."

"There have to be people in other countries."

"I suppose there are, but unless this disease is stopped there won't be for long. That woman last night really shook me. I'd begun to believe that just maybe we were immune, having lasted this long."

"For some reason I have some hope now. Sean said Barry claimed these people have a cure, or defence of some kind."

"Barry was only passing on what Robin told him. I talked to Robin this morning, he hasn't long to go. Anyway Robin sat with your prisoner all night, he shot him three times, in the legs, when he wouldn't talk. Then the man started watching the clock Robin has in there. They became soul mates, the man holding nothing back. Unfortunately he went off earlier."

"Robin shot him!" exclaimed Tanya, not really believing it.

"Bit of a dark horse Robin. Yes he shot the man. It could be the virus though, he's not the same person he was a few days ago. The clock's taken over his life, he doesn't care about anything else. The man went the same way, didn't even feel his wounds once the clock took over. They talked most of the night like old friends, both sharing the same clock."

"The man went off in one night, not three days?" asked Sean.

"Yes, same thing happened to the other one, he went off virtually overnight."

"What about that woman last night?"

"No, that was normal. She started a few days ago, and gradually got worse. The people she was with were looking after her, making sure she got food and stuff, and keeping her with them. All yesterday she never took her eyes off her watch, till the last seconds, then she looked up at something, but we'll never know what. I don't think the disease has changed, I think it must be something to do with the defence they use in Whitby."

"They weren't in Whitby!"

"Our prisoner told Robin that those devices there are supposed to give you protection, but they don't seem to do anything," she said, indicating two small black boxes on the table. "We don't even know if they're switched on. Barry says the men wear them on their belt. He wants to smash one open later to see what's inside."

"Think it's a gas or something?" asked Sean, handling one.

"No sign of anything coming out."

"It might be a good idea to see if we can find a supply of these while we're there."

"Not really Sean," replied Tanya. "If we don't find out how to stop this thing altogether then they only buy time. If we do they're superfluous."

"We'll just have to see what happens there," said Sean tossing the device back on the table with the other. "I've no doubt it won't be what we expect, so maybe it will go well."

"The eternal optimist," remarked Alan walking in. "How are you doing with the computer Cath?"

"Got a program I'm familiar with. How do we start this?"

"How about 'In the end'."

"Funny, What about ' We need help.'"

"That's good, start with an understatement."

"We need your help," put in Tanya. "We're going to try to defeat those in charge, take away their power. We need everyone to fight them, take control. You outnumber them, help us get control for everyone. They have a cure and we all need it."

"That should stir a few of them up," remarked Sean.

"Yes," said Cath, typing it in. "We might want to modify the wording a bit, but I think that's more or less all we need. The shorter the better."

"Hardly worth starting the generator for. We could have written a few dozen of those long hand in an hour."

"Now that's more or less done we can start on some lunch for everyone. Come on Sean, help me cook something for when they all start coming back. Cath and Alan can manage without us."

chap12

They set off late afternoon, hoping to make Whitby between two and four in the morning. Thirty horses in all, five carrying their jerry cans full of explosive and five carrying food and other supplies they might need, including the rpg and four rockets. All were dressed in army uniforms, but not all looked like soldiers. They all carried weapons, rifles and pistols, and had been given a crash course in using them by Barry and Craig.

Craig and two others were to float down the river with the cans, which were tied together in two bundles separated by a long rope. The idea was to let the cans float either side of the bow, the rope then stopping them near the centre of the ship, the rope held in place on the bow by a strong magnet. Craig and one other would both light the fuses at a signal from the third who'd stay near the bow so both could see him. Then they'd simply swim away downstream and get out further down to join the rest in town.

The rest were to make their way down the river bank and get as near to town as they could then wait for the ship to go. At that signal they would walk into the town, straight towards the area near the ship. By this time they hoped there would be crowds gathered in the area, and they would melt in, passing out their leaflets before trying to find and attack the headquarters.

Remarkably they made the town just upstream without incident and on time. There was no problem getting the cans in the water, but the river wasn't deep enough to swim. Craig waded down stream with them.

Once Craig reached the tidal areas the water was deep, the tide was in, but falling. This helped them, because as soon as they began to swim with the cans the current swiftly moved them towards the harbour. As the first hint of dawn was already in the air they could see the large ship clearly, tied to the dock just on the inland side of the road bridge.

Manoeuvring to the ship did prove troublesome, the current tended to swing them away, but they managed to get the cans either side and anchor the rope on the bow. There were no sentries or other sign of life at all. It was now light enough that they could be seen from the other side of the harbour, but nothing stirred there. They lit the fuses at a signal from the bowman, then all

three raced downstream and away from the ship, managing to climb out at some steps.

"This has all been too easy." whispered Craig to his companions.

"There are no guards, no sentries, in fact no one at all down here near the river."

"Sean said all the guards were higher in town guarding the streets. Since he and Tanya went in that way maybe that's the only danger they see."

"It still seems odd they don't guard their ship."

"I thought I saw someone near the gang plank, but couldn't be sure. He couldn't see us from there anyway."

"No point worrying now, it should go any second."

Just as he spoke a massive explosion shook the ground. They couldn't see the ship, but all the lamps went out, and giant ball of rolling smoke appeared over the road bridge. As that drifted up and out more smoke followed, this a dark mass slowly rising and drifting downstream with the wind. Soon the smoke engulfed them, and all the lower harbour area, thick and choking. They quickly scrambled up onto the road.

The others had all walked quickly towards the area as soon as the explosion went off. There were many people also moving that way, coming from houses all around, but so far no soldiers. At first the people avoided the large group in uniforms but as more leaflets were handed around some joined with them.

As they came along the road towards the dock the ship could be clearly seen. There were a handful of people rushing about the decks, but generally there didn't seem to be much damage, and it certainly hadn't sunk. Suddenly there was shouting, shots rang out, and general panic ensued, everyone running for cover. The group suddenly found themselves exposed and in the open, then more shots sounded and two in the group dropped. Sean suddenly realised what had happened, they were in a trap. Shots were coming from the ship and the two old bank buildings directly across the road from it. They had nowhere to run to get cover. Sean lifted his rifle and began running towards the ship, firing as he ran. A man appeared at the end of the gangplank, blocking their way. Sean simply kept firing his rifle as he ran towards him. The man spun and flipped over the hand rope to the water. Sean was on the ship.

He ran straight into the first door, still firing his rifle. There were stairs inside going up and down, he bounded upwards, emerging into the large control room. Two men in there were firing through a door towards the docks, Sean just squeezed the trigger and held it, putting a long burst towards them. One slammed into the door, the other spun round throwing his rifle away and putting up his hands. Sean couldn't stop firing, but his gun did, it ran out of bullets, the last one hitting the man in the leg almost at the same instant he'd thrown his gun away.

More came in behind Sean, all breathless. The whole thing from the first shot to taking the control room had taken only a few seconds, but in that time half of the group were either dead or wounded on the dock. Tanya was

crouched against the wall near the two wounded men at the door facing the dock. The others were scattered about the room, with some below in the other room. Al was quiet, strangely quiet compared to the pandemonium of a minute ago.

"What now Sean?" asked Craig, dripping in the doorway at the top of the steps. He'd managed to get a rifle from somewhere.

"I don't know. I'm still trying to work out what happened. A minute ago we were passing out leaflets to friendly crowds and now we're here with bodies all over the place. I've no idea what happened between. What went wrong? Why is the ship still in tact."

"It's not. It's sat on the bottom. Look out over the deck, all the hatches have blown off and the plates are bulged upwards. There must be massive holes through the hull. The generator is out, all the lamps went out."

"Why are there indicator lights all over these panels then?" asked Sean, sweeping his arm around the room which was lined with panels, all with gauges and lights still operating.

"Maybe the ships own power is supplied by separate generators in the engine room or something. I don't know and it doesn't matter. The big generator is out, and we have control of the ship. From this position I'm sure we can shut down any other power on board. So far we've achieved more than I thought possible. I couldn't believe it when I saw you running up the walkway onto the ship. It never even occurred to me that we might be able to take this thing."

"Well now we've got it I don't know what to do. The townspeople have all gone to ground, not surprisingly with bullets flying all over. There are people with guns in those two stone buildings, we've no chance of getting back off, apart from jumping over the other side."

"As usual you've done your part, we've got two hostages."

"Only one," remarked Tanya. "One's dead."

Craig crouched and came into the room, crawled over to Tanya.

"I'm not sure a hostage is worth much. How much are you worth to them, and even more importantly how much are you worth to us."

The man didn't answer immediately, he was sweating profusely and rolling his head from side to side in agony from the wound just above his knee. Craig jerked his hands from the wound, blood literally squirted out, so he let go and the man re-clamped it. He gave a scream of pain then snarled at Craig.

"You're all dead, you've just destroyed our defence against the disease."

Lean crawled over to them. "Let me see what I can do about that bleeding. I'm a doctor."

He reluctantly un-clamped the wound, the blood didn't come out nearly so quickly. Lean put a pad on both sides of his leg and bandaged it tightly.

"That should stop the bleeding, it's a clean wound. It'll probably heal reasonably well in time."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Craig, replying to the man's

comment. "But we didn't come here expecting anything else. We've already gone way beyond what we expected. So, I'll ask again, what are you worth to us?"

"Probably nothing. They certainly won't bargain for me."

"Pity." Craig swung his rifle round and the man jerked against the wall.

"Wait a minute Craig," said Sean, not at all sure whether he was going to shoot the man or not. "This panel over here is almost dead. Most of the lights are out, but some of the gauges are flickering about. What's this panel?"

"It controls the power feed to town." Replied the man through gritted teeth.

"If the generator is down why are these gauges flickering?"

Barry crawled onto the bridge, almost as wet as Craig. He crouched beside the doorway staring at the injured man.

"I don't know. There are probably all kinds of shorts."

Barry crawled over beside Sean at the dead panel "This panel controls the street lights doesn't it?"

"I've just said, it controls all power to town."

"Down below is a high voltage generator. The power is fed from here to a substation. Why are these circuits separate?"

"I don't know."

"You know, otherwise you wouldn't be here at this time in the morning. These gauges show the signal feed to the lamps, which is still operating." Barry threw every switch on the panel to off and the signals stopped. "Sean we have two hostages, dead or alive doesn't matter so long as those outside don't know they're dead, so if you don't mind I'd like to take charge of this one."

"He's yours," said Sean, relieved to be rid of responsibility for him.

"Craig every time he answers a question wrong or doesn't answer I'd like you to shoot him. Start with his other leg, then his arms and then go back to his legs. You could probably get ten or more shots in each leg. And you whatever your name is, when I ask a question I will usually know the answer, or part of it.

"Question one. What transmissions are being put out by this ship?"

"A brainwave blocking broadcast, and the satellite blocking beam."

"Question two. What is the virus?"

"It's a digital code recognised by the subconscious mind."

"How does it spread?"

"It's transmitted by a satellite in orbit."

"You mean that a satellite is killing everyone?"

"It wasn't meant to. It was only meant to target certain people or groups, but things went wrong."

"You built a satellite that killed people or groups?"

"I didn't build it. It had nothing to do with me. It was to protect society from people who could control them, like Hitler. It targeted people

who gained control of their subconscious, because through telepathy they could control others."

"Isn't that what you've been doing?"

"Yes, but to protect society."

"Would these people, or you, be able to control if everyone knew what their powers were, if everyone used telepathy."

"No, no one would be in control. Total chaos, anarchy."

"So ordinary people aren't capable of controlling themselves, but you are."

"I built a billion pound company from nothing, employing thousands. That qualifies me to control others. I gave them a living. Without us keeping order they're just savages, rioting and looting."

"So you suppress telepathy in the masses so they can be controlled, then you eliminate any others who might take control so that you can make things the way they should be, in your opinion. The rulers, you, and the slaves, the rest of us."

"What did you lack. You had food, housing, car, TV etc. Everyone knew they were controlled, they didn't care so long as the wage came in every week."

"So what went wrong?"

"The satellite, I've just told you."

"Why did you need the satellite? You had all the other controls, like lamps and laws etc."

"It was just a machine to get better control. Spread the order worldwide."

"Barry do you think this is the time for a discussion on politics, or ideologies. We're trapped in here, and it's only a matter of time before they find some way to get us." Interrupted Sean.

"They won't come here after us. We've plenty of time."

"Why not?"

"This is their main weapon. All the technology they need to retake control some time in the future is here. If we had succeeded in sinking it or blowing it up they'd be finished. They aren't going risk destroying it themselves."

"This ship is all that's keeping anybody alive. Destroy it and you condemn yourselves as well."

"This ship would eventually have run out of fuel. How did you propose to keep alive then."

"The satellite would have been destroyed. That's why the people have been collected, to train them to run a power station. Once we have a station running we can feed the power to the radar station and use it as a transmitter to blow the satellite electronics."

"Why didn't you feed power from this ship there."

"That's too difficult."

"It's a lot easier to use existing pylons, cutting the wires beyond the station than to get a plant running and cut all lines except the one to the radar

station. But that would have meant you wouldn't have had control of all the survivors."

"That's not the reason, it's a moot point now though."

"Yes it is! Why wasn't the satellite destroyed when it first went wrong, while there were still power plants running."

"We had to keep it secret. There'd have been a world war if anyone found out it was our satellite killing everyone. We didn't have the equipment to destroy it."

"You mean you'd have been lynched. You kept quiet about it to save your own necks, even though it meant the death of billions. How many more satellites are there, like this one?"

"Four, but they're all inactive, they were never started up."

"This ship can transmit the virus can't it."

"Not now, it needed the main generator."

"Over there Sean is a self destruct mechanism for this ship. If we destroy the ship everybody dies, sooner or later. If we don't they'll eventually regain control, and build a truly puppet society, like they've been trying to do for years. I've only told you a tiny fraction of the things they've done to me and people like me. In a way I'm lucky, I'm still alive, hundreds of thousands aren't."

"We can turn off everything but the satellite blocking transmission." Said Sean, reluctant to surrender to such desperate measures.

"They'll attack if you do that, they've nothing to lose."

"Sean, you can turn off or destroy the satellite from here. He knows how to do it. said Tanya.

"Craig, don't kill him, but see how many holes you can put in him."

"All right, it's that switch there, the ships self destruct, but it may not work."

Before anyone said anything else, one of those at the window interrupted. "Looks like they're getting ready to storm the place."

"We can't hold this place, Tanya do you believe him?"

"As far as I can tell he's telling the truth."

"Everybody over the side and swim to the other bank. I'll operate this switch and then smash these panels. That's the best we can do for now. Go, everybody off the ship."

"You don't know it will work Sean," said Craig.

"We don't know anything for certain, but I don't see a better alternative. Staying here and dying defending this ship won't achieve anything. If we go we get other chances. What we've already done may have all kinds of consequences we can't even imagine."

Craig thought for a moment. "Sure you don't need help?"

"No, please go, all of you."

Craig opened the other door, went down the stairs to the deck then flung himself over the side, the others soon did the same, except Tanya.

Sean didn't bother trying to persuade her, he just shrugged and then smashed the plastic cover over the switch and threw it, then he pulled down

the fire axe and began smashing everything on the bridge except the panel with the self destruct switch. In his enthusiasm his head came above the window level and several bullets whistled through but missed him. He ducked back down almost shaking.

"That's enough Sean, lets get out of here."

"What about him?" he asked as he dropped the axe and regained his rifle.

"Leave him, there's been enough killing.

"Al right, go!"

They both crawled out and over the side.

chap13

They all scrambled out on the mud flats left by the receding water and turned to face the ship. Craig waded back in to help Tanya and Sean but they hadn't even cleared the water when a burst of gunfire from the ship sent them all scrambling for cover.

They assembled behind a boat near the sea wall.

"What now?" asked Craig.

"I don't know," replied Sean, lowering his head. He'd fouled up again, the raid had gone as badly as he'd expected. They might have achieved nothing. If that switch hadn't turned off the virus they may have condemned everyone.

Tanya wrapped her arms round one of his. "Sean I believe you turned off the virus. He was lying about something, but I could tell he was serious about the virus. I feel its gone as well."

Before anyone could reply a voice from the the top of the wall shook them all. "Don't any of you do anything stupid, we have four guns on you. Come out from there and get up here."

There was nothing they could do, four soldiers were standing atop the wall with rifles. They dejectedly walked from behind the boat and along the wall to a ramp. Once on top the soldiers herded them away from the river on to the road. They now had a building blocking their view of the boat and other side of the river.

"All right, stop here, and start explaining what you were trying to do. What's all this about turning off the virus?"

"The people on that boat made the virus," began Tanya. "It was transmitted from a satellite all over the world. They could turn it off any time they wanted. I think we've turned it off but if they get enough power back on the boat they could transmit it from there. I don't know how far that would reach. They might be able to turn the satellite back on. We were trying to destroy the boat."

The soldiers looked perplexed. "You can't turn viruses on and off."

"You can this one. Its not a virus like a cold or flu its like a computer virus. Its a signal that affects the brain, tells it to self destruct. Its not a virus at

all, just a radio message. That ship has been transmitting a blocking signal of some kind, protecting those around it while everywhere else people are dying every day."

"Why would they do that?"

"Power, control. They didn't mean to kill everyone, just those they couldn't control, but it went wrong. They didn't shut it down because they lost some of their own people so let it run but protected enough to start again with complete control. They want a world of puppets. They have complete control of the people here and intended to let the rest die."

"How do you know all this?"

"It's a long story, but one of them confirmed it all, and told us a lot we didn't know. We captured him on the boat this morning."

"That was Chantry, he lives there, it's his boat."

"You know what's going on here, how the people are controlled and you know what I'm saying is the truth."

"Maybe, but we are protected from the virus. What you did could have killed us all."

"It could have saved us all!" snapped Craig. "It's better to be dead than live as a slave. The virus can be turned off, and might have been. They've killed billions of people, and you're helping them. Fight them, take over, make them turn off the satellite if we haven't then completely destroy that boat."

"There are four of us here at this side, Chantry has dozens over there."

"Four of you, I thought you were always in fives."

"Our 'officer' had an accident. He told us to shoot you while you were in the water."

"If you're on our side then let's get out of here," suggested Craig. "Before any others get over here."

"I didn't say we were on your side, and the bridge is up. I don't think they have enough power to lower it, which means they won't come over here till the tides low enough to wade across."

"What are you going to do then?" asked Craig.

"I don't know. Leaving doesn't seem wise. We're protected here."

"That's all right for you but what about us?" asked Tanya.

"You can go wherever you want."

"Let's go," said Tanya grabbing Sean's arm and setting off. Sean pulled away. "No Tanya, that's no good." He turned to the soldiers. "We were told there were children over here, where are they?"

"In these houses along the street. Some have been moved over the other side, they were going to move them all there today."

Sean raced off towards the first of the houses, everyone else just stayed as they were. He soon came out of the first and went into the next. After a few minutes he emerged with a young girl and quickly walked over to them.

"This is Susan, my daughter. She says Rob my son is over the other side. I'm not leaving without him."

"They can't leave. We don't know why but anyone who's been here a

long time dies as soon as they leave. People who've run off have always died the first day. We have some little boxes we wear to go out of town, but they only protect you for a few days."

"In that case I'm staying. I'm not leaving my children again."

To everyone's surprise Craig stepped in on Sean's behalf. "Before anybody says anything I think he's right. What's the point of leaving when we don't know if the jobs done or not. We came here to find out what was going on and to do as much damage to those in control as we could. Now we know all the answers are here we can't leave. We have to finish this whole thing. We won't get another chance."

"What do you think we should do?" asked Tanya.

"I have no idea. So far all Sean's ideas have worked out better than we could have dreamed. My only contribution, blowing up the ship failed miserably. So what do we do now Sean?"

For once Sean's mind was perfectly clear. "Will you four help us?"

"Not in any suicide."

"Craig can you run back up river to where we left the horses and get the rocket launcher, in fact bring the horses with all the gear if you can."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'm not quite sure yet, but I'll have it all worked out by the time you get back."

Craig smiled, then turned and set off sprinting along the road.

"Can you four watch the river and shoot near anyone trying to cross. Don't shoot to hit them unless they shoot at you or anything, just scare them back."

"All right, but I hope you have a good plan because we'll be in serious trouble. We can't leave no matter what."

"Tanya says she believes the virus to be turned off. I'd risk my life on that. I'd not only leave but get as far from that ship as possible, in case the transmission is turned on there."

The soldier smiled but didn't reply. All four went back towards the river.

"What is the plan Sean?" Tanya asked.

"You know what you've told me about telepathy, well I'm trusting my senses. Don't ask questions or even try to guess. Just wait now till Craig gets back. It all depends on him getting to the horses before they do."

They all sat on the curb to wait, no one saying anything. After about 1/2 hour one of the soldiers came from the river.

"There's someone wading across with a white flag."

"Craig made it." Stated Sean. "Can you bring him up here so we can all talk to him."

The soldier went back without comment. A few minutes later he re-appeared walking behind a man in his fifties, soaked to the skin.

Sean walked to meet him. "You know what we can do. Tell the one in charge to shut down all controls from that ship. If he does that, he and his helpers are free to leave, that includes you."

"I came here to explain what's happening and why. We need the ship to maintain civilisation. without it there's chaos, anarchy."

"You were sent here to delay us. As soon as Craig gets back we destroy the aerials and controls, and probably the whole boat. He should be back in a few minutes, that's how long you have to decide."

"You can't do that, there are four children on board."

"If you leave now you go free. Once we fire on the boat that option does not exist. If any children are injured I will personally insure that none of you survive. 'AND YOU KNOW I MEAN IT!' he shouted towards the boat.

A public address system burst into life. 'I'm injured and cannot walk, as you know.'

"Crawl! Or get your pets to carry you." responded Sean, now completely ignoring the emissary

'I want a guarantee of safety.' echoed the address system.

Pounding hooves rapidly approaching stopped further conversation. Craig drew up with five others leading all the other horses. he jumped down and ran over to them.

"The whole towns rebelled. There's only about thirty of them holed up on the boat and a couple of buildings nearby."

Lean walked over to them more calmly. "He's right Sean, we've won. Whatever control they had is gone. Even most of the soldiers are with the rest of the people. They have weapons and when they get organised there's going to be a pitched battle."

Sean turned towards the boat once more. "Get into one of the little boats, leave that way. We won't fire on you, but do it now!"

They could see movement on and around the boat, then two in the water wading to a power boat. They got on it and drove it alongside the large boat. people began scrambling onto it. The emissary turned and ran back to the river and waded in.

"Lean, is there any of our people over there?"

"Liam is there, he's injured but not badly."

"Can you get a message to him to take over the ship."

"I'll wade across and do it myself. I'll just shut everything down."

"Shut everything down then set it on fire."

As Lean set off for the water Craig unloaded the rocket launcher and set it on the low wall.

"We can't let them go Sean, you know that."

"I said we wouldn't fire on them Craig. Don't start our new life with murder and making me a liar."

"We can't let them go, they'll just rebuild somewhere else. They have their machines all over the place and he knows where and how to use them. All he has to do is find some way to power them."

"He won't, trust me."

Chantry watched helplessly as the one called Sean, the apparent leader smashed the self destruct switch case and operated the lever, then smashed all the other controls. He and the girl then left, jumped over the side. Chantry struggled frantically to get to the control panel, but couldn't make it in time. The transmission to shut down the satellite went out, and the satellite was above the horizon.

Moran rushed in just too late, and helped Chantry to a chair. Others followed almost at once. Many were armed and took up positions at the windows.

"What's happening in town?" demanded Chantry.

"We're losing, most of the soldiers have turned against us, but just now there's total chaos, they have no leader. You'll have to take this ship out, the bridge is up and we can easily cast off the lines."

"You're a little behind events, this boat will never sail again. It's had the bottom ripped open."

"What do we do then?" snapped Moran.

"We try to bargain with them, delay them. Go see if the children are still alive, their cabins are locked but will open from the outside. Bring them up here. I have weapons on board they've never dreamt of, but I can't get to them because of the damage below. We should be able to force a way to them as soon as the tide is out enough to lower the water level."

"We may not have much time, they have an RPG just up the river. One of the wounded ones was shouting to someone to get it. I've sent two of our men up to find it, but whether they will or not is anybody's guess."

"All right, if we find the RPG it buys us time, if not Actin, make a white flag and go over to those on the other side of the river. One called Sean is the leader, at least of those who did all the damage. He'd probably be accepted as leader by the town peasants when they get sorted out. Talk to him, try to make a deal, any deal that gives us time. We need a few hours."

"What if they won't bargain, we're trapped here, and a few grenades into this bridge and we're dead?" asked Moran.

"They'll bargain, at least to let us leave here, we have the children, and they think they've destroyed the ship. When we leave I can set the ships transmitter to wipe them out. I know enough to set up elsewhere. There's all the equipment you could ever want out there, just waiting for someone who knows how to use it. I know where it is and how to use it."

The chances of salvaging this situation were not good. Chantry needed all these men just to survive this crisis, but then he'd have to dispose of them all. His only chance of long term survival depended on getting under cover, blending in with whatever population he could. No one must know who or what he was. All those within a mile of the ship would be destroyed when he turned on the transmitter. With any luck at all no one outside that area would know he was still alive, in fact no one who'd ever known of his existence would be alive.

Moran interrupted chantry's thoughts. "Our patrol just signalled, some five or six people with about thirty horses have set off down the other side. They were too late to do anything."

"All right, get the children up here, Actin get over there. We're relying on you buying us time.

Chantry could sense that Actin wasn't going to fool them almost as soon as he left. Actin knew he'd be lying, and they'd sense it as well. He wasn't in the least surprised when the ruse failed and he was given an ultimatum, leave now in a little boat or die.

He had no choice but to comply, he was lucky they'd given him even this chance. It meant he had no chance to set the boats transmitter for a delayed transmission of the virus. He couldn't risk transmitting immediately, because they would know he had and the effects wouldn't be instant, he'd also be in range himself, and didn't trust the small box to protect against the powerful transmission this close to the source.

All was not lost however. He still had his briefcase, and with that could set off the transmitter from a distance. Should they damage the ship and prevent that, well then it would take longer. All the satellites were still operational, once he got to a major control station and managed to get some power from emergency generators or something he could turn on any or all, after making sure he was safe. He had other options as well, once they were clear and free.

"I've let the children out but they're trying to bandage a bad cut one of the young ones has, they'll be up in a minute."

"All right Moran, get that motor boat over here, and make sure it has fuel."

Moran climbed over the side and another went to help. They soon pulled the boat alongside. All four children emerged onto the bridge at the same time.

"Ah Rob, are you all right?"

Rob nodded, none of them were seriously injured but all were in shock from the explosion.

"Rob here's the key to my cabin, go there and under the bed you'll find a silver case, bring it to me please. Hurry!"

Rob left to get the case..

"There isn't room for us all!" stated Moran from the prow of the boat, barely six feet below the deck of the larger boat which was completely flooded and just resting on the mud.

The four children could have been an asset, but Chantry doubted very much he'd have been allowed to take them. There really wasn't room in the boat anyway, and as soon as his leg healed and they'd settled somewhere safe they'd have had to go, along with the other fifteen.

"There is, the children aren't coming, I'm pretty sure they won't stand for that," replied Chantry.

"If we don't take them what's to stop them firing at us?"

"Their word. I trust them to keep it, so long as we leave quickly and

don't give them too much time to think. You two, help me in the boat."

Chantry was soon seated at the wheel and asked for his briefcase. He had to wait several minutes before Rob passed it down to one of the men carefully and Chantry slid it between his legs. The rest were soon in the boat and it immediately set off at speed down river towards the ocean.

Rob couldn't understand what was happening. His ears were ringing, head spinning and he was laid up against the cabin door. He had bruises all over, which were starting to hurt, adding to the confusion. He struggled to his feet and tried to open the door, he couldn't it was stuck. He began banging on it and shouting, but there was no response. Standing quiet for a moment and listening he heard the sound of feet stamping up the stairs. He also noticed it was quiet, the perpetual hum of the main generator had gone.

He frantically struggled with the door but it wouldn't open, then he heard sounds from the other cabins, the others were also trapped.

"Alice!" he shouted, "what's happening?"

"I don't know my cabin door won't open."

"Mine neither. I heard Chantry running up the steps, he's just left us. Something must have blown up."

"What if it catches fire, were trapped here." Alice began frantic banging and shouting.

After what seemed a long time when nothing at all happened Alice calmed and just listened, as Rob was doing. There was no sound at all, complete silence. Then the rattle of gunfire echoed through the ship, startling them all. Again there were noises on the stairs, more shots, then silence again.

Rob again tried frantically to open the door, even kicking it, but it was too strong, he couldn't break it. He waited several minutes, then sat on the bed. There was nothing else he could do. If the ship had been attacked, maybe even by his father there's no way he would know Rob was here. All he could do was wait till someone opened the door.

He heard motion outside his cabin, the door opened and Moran stuck his head in. "Chantry wants you up on the bridge."

As Moran moved to the next cabin Rob noticed him pull a small latch near the top of the door, the doors weren't stuck they were locked. Chantry must have locked them while they were asleep, and then left them when the explosion happened. Rob ducked back into his cabin and grabbed a piece of paper. He'd worked out how to rig the case and now he was going to do it. He didn't know what would happen when it went off but Chantry would pay for his mother, whatever else happened.

Moran had just opened the last cabin as Rob came out and joined them. The young boy had a cut on his head, not bad but bleeding quite a lot. Rob saw his chance and took it.

"We should put a plaster or something on his head, I've got one in my cabin. I'll bring him up as soon as its bandaged."

Moran was obviously in a hurry. "All right but hurry, we don't have much time."

"What happened?" Asked Rob as he led the boy towards his cabin.

"There's been some trouble, hurry up with that then bring him up, I can't wait." Moran hurried up the stairs.

"Alice can you and Sam put a plaster on John, stop the bleeding, they're in my first aid kit above the bed. I have something else to do."

The two girls led the boy away and Rob grabbed the handle of Chantry's cabin, it was locked. He could do nothing. He put the paper in his pocket and went and helped with the young boy. He'd get a chance sometime he was sure.

As Rob stepped onto the bridge he was staggered by the damage. Everything was smashed, all the windows either smashed or had bullet holes. A man lay at the side covered in blood, and Chantry sat on a chair, his legs covered in blood, his right leg bandaged. There was glass everywhere, it crunched underfoot as he moved.

"Ah Rob, are you all right?"

Rob nodded. Chantry was injured, but not seriously enough for Rob. Rob's heart almost stopped at the next words.

"Rob here's the key to my cabin, go there and under the bed you'll find a silver case, bring it to me please. Hurry!"

He flew down the stairs, struggled with the lock a little but soon he was in the cabin with the case open. He lifted the keypad, squeezed the remaining battery back enough to slide the paper between the battery contacts and the case contacts. He pushed one of the detonator wires down one side of the paper touching the battery, the other wire he pushed the other side touching the case contact. He carefully put the keypad back in place and closed the case.

As Rob came up the first flight of stairs the outside door was open, all the tribunes were scrambling over the side of the deck into a small powerboat. The other three children were still up in the bridge watching through the broken windows. Rob walked quickly out and passed the case down. Chantry was in the drivers seat, and slid the case between his legs. It might be days before he turned it on, but Rob wasn't worried. Sooner or later Chantry would switch it on.

As Rob looked up he could see the small group at the other side. His father was there, he could sense it. His father was worried, torn between letting Chantry go or destroying the boat. Rob wasn't worried any more, it was taken care of. His sense of calm seemed to transmit to his father, because he also calmed. Sue was there as well, they would be together. Rob felt incredibly calm, at last things were working out, they'd soon be a family again, but his mother wouldn't be there.

The look Rob gave Chantry as the boat pulled away would have told Chantry everything, but Chantry had other worries, and was in pain. His normal paranoia didn't include Rob, he was just a child, bright but destined for

nothing. Just one more rogue child to follow the rest to an early grave.

At about two miles out Chantry stopped the boat and lifted his case onto his lap. The pain it caused as soon as it touched his injured thigh made him curse, but he grit his teeth and flicked the latches and opened it. They thought they'd won, a rag tag army wasn't enough to beat him. He smiled as he switched on the power.

Craig tracked the boat with the rocket launcher but didn't fire as it moved out of range. Then he stood up and watched with the others as it moved quickly away. Just before it disappeared over the horizon it stopped.

"What do you think they're doing now....."

Craig never finished his question, there was a bright flash and small mushroom of smoke as the boat exploded.

"All right," said Craig, turning to Sean and smiling broadly, "How did you arrange that?"

"I didn't!" replied Sean looking shocked. "I knew something would happen but not that." Sean looked devastated.

"I won't doubt your word, but I think you might explain?"

"Let's get that boat in the water and get back over there. I want an explanation a lot more than you. My son did that, and he's twelve years old."